MARCIA

ELLEN OLNEY KIRK

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A NOVEL

BY

ELLEN OLNEY KIRK

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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J. F. K.

— "That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be ; some interchange
Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile." —

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MARCIA

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THE DEAD HAND IS LIFTED

"It is a regular calling of the watch together to thank God we are rid of a knave," said Mr. Bevis, as he came in on that September morning.

Mr. Bevis was not one of my regular guardians as by law appointed, but one I had adopted, or been adopted by; for he always said that from the first moment he saw me it became a matter of conscience for him to look after me.

"It is n't so much because I am fond of Marcia as it is because she is the duty that lies nearest, and a duty is a duty," he would observe, "no matter how painful and arduous."

I had, indeed, taken Mr. Bevis at his word. He was extraordinarily clever, and he had coached me, quizzed me, prompted me, all through my school and college days. Mr. Bickerdyke was not a guardian either, but he had been for a great many years manager of the Swallowfield property, and had wrung from it the money to pay my bills, and had accordingly dictated to me in the matter of my personal expenditures.

Mr. Bickerdyke's sense of duty was quite as keen as Mr. Bevis's, and there had been hardly an item he did not question. Until his mother's death, when he came back to Swallowfield to live with his sister, he had been a lawyer with an established reputation for his success in cross-examination. He was a man of rather stern aspect, with a huge white forehead, pent-house brows, and eyes full of smouldering fire. There was an energy in his accent, and an air of disdain for anything poor or trifling, which inspired awe. But I was very fond of Mr. Bickerdyke, and not in the least afraid of him even when before paying my bills he used to challenge the items: —

"Two dozen handkerchiefs at once! What could any one, any one in the last stages of hay-fever, do with two dozen handkerchiefs at once?" or,

"A dozen pairs of stockings! Why surely, Marcia, this is incredible! Are you a centipede?"

Mr. John Lee and my mother's sister, Mrs. Langdon Stuart of New York, were the legal guardians decreed me by the court of administration, after the death of my father and mother. Mr. Lee was at the head of the great steel works in South Swallowfield, — a bland, smooth, polished man, — and in a certain way as hard as the finished product of the industries he presided over. He had been one of my best friends, put-

ting an end to all the disorder in our family affairs. My Aunt Mary was a rather clever, handsome woman of forty-five, at once worldly and unworldly, fascinated by the lust of the eye and the pride of life, carried away by social competitions, yet at times longing to escape them. My Cousin Lilly, who exactly resembled her mother in loving to slip along the road of life, accepting the habits and fashions of other people, and ignoring their problems, now sat beside her.

"Yes," said Mr. Bevis, "it is a regular calling of the watch together to thank God we are rid of a knave."

He said this to Gaynor Lee, Mr. Lee's youngest son, who had been going to and fro between the Lee house and mine all the morning, bringing in tin boxes of papers containing deeds and accounts, and finally dragging a hamper through the dining-room where we were all gathered, into the smaller breakfast-room adjoining, where lunch was to be served later. I had wondered what the hamper contained, and having known Gay all my life it would have been easy and natural to have bade him disclose the secret and end my curiosity. But to-day I had the sensation of a new world and a new atmosphere, also of a new necessity for discretion and dignity. Besides, a sort of strangeness seemed to invest my old friend, who had been studying forestry in the far West all summer and who had not returned until

yesterday. He had grown tall in the whole year's interval since I had seen him, and the change made by his slim height was further accentuated by a droll little mustache of the palest yellow, which showed an almost horizontal line above his lips, and as if to increase a certain effect of superciliousness was turned up at each end. Or did that superciliousness come from the eye-glasses which he sported as if for a further affectation? I had remarked to Lilly that I felt like asking, "But, Gay, why do you wear eye-glasses?" upon which Lilly replied, —

"He would say like the wolf, 'The better to look at you, my dear.'"

And it did seem as if the young fellow stared at me. Why, it would have been no easy matter to explain, for in me, Marcia Dundas, there was no change, no shadow of mystery. Whatever I had been as a child I was now; a little taller than others, with too much eagerness of fibre, muscle, sinew, nerve, to be otherwise than thin, but always overstrong, overfull of life. This exuberance, this superabundance, was in my hair, which, no matter how coiled or plaited, was always tumbling about my forehead and temples; in my eyes, which could be long and languid, showing cool gray gleams, but had a trick of turning intensely black when I grew more alive; even in my complexion, which, rather a good, pale ivory, upon the least excitement had a way of first

lighting up with a sort of superfluous luminosity which presently set my cheeks and lips aglow.

"Yes," said Mr. Bevis, "I do not know how her proper guardians may feel, but Marcia has been a good deal on my mind."

"Don't fancy you are rid of me yet," I put in. "The trouble has only just begun."

"Rid of you? No indeed," said Mr. Bevis. "So long as you could be kept at work on the alphabet and multiplication tables we might reflect that you were tolerably safe; but now that you are old enough to have lovers and husbands" —

The depot wagon clattered up to the door.

"Mr. Chilton at last," said Mr. Lee.

Mr. Chilton it was, a little man with a limp, with a small pale face closely shaven, and a clear acute look out of his dark eyes, who came in, followed by a younger man, apparently a stenographer, for he at once, without expecting to be introduced, sat down at a side table, and took out pencil and tablets. Chilton & Chilton had been trustees of the Dundas property for more than half a century; had drawn up my great-grandfather's will, which left everything to his wife, Marcia Chauncey Dundas; then with my father's help had devised the curious deed of settlement which had through all the dire straits of the family poverty kept the real estate intact. Business began on the instant. Mr. Lee brought pen,

ink, and a great sheet of blotting-paper, and placed them before me, then sat down opposite beside Mr. Chilton, who held in his hand a copy of my great-grandmother's last will and testament. She had been born Marcia Chauncey; had married Paul Dundas, who not many years later had stood surety for her brother through a great financial crisis, and losing heavily had died of a stroke of apoplexy. This Marcia Chauncey had survived her husband many years, making every sort of effort to mend the dwindling fortunes of the family; losing one by one each of her five children, and at last being left with one sole descendant, her little orphan grandson Paul, my father, whom she had brought up in this house. She had never ceased to suffer from the memory that it was her brother's misfortune which had cost the Dundases so dear. She had died six months after my father had come of age, and it was that unhappy boy, with his ardent faith and high courage, who had had to count up and pay down the price. He had helped her to contrive the will by which all this Swallowfield estate and all the Western lands were inalienably settled upon his children, who should attain possession and adjudication only upon the majority of the youngest child.

At last, on this nineteenth day of September, 189–, I, the only child of Paul Dundas, was entitled to succeed to the long sequestered property.

Mr. Chilton made a brief statement. It had been hoped that the Pennsylvania lands might develop iron or coal or oil. Such had not been the case. Unluckily even their worth in timber was still a matter of hope, as they had been twice burned over within ten years. Another wrecked hope was represented in the family assets by a tract of barren mountain-side in Montana. This had belonged to my great-uncle, Harry Dundas, who had first gone out West and bought a ranch in the hope of retrieving both his lost health and lost fortune. He had been carried away by the gold and silver craze, and disposing of his land, cattle, and sheep, had sunk all the money he could raise in establishing this claim which had turned out to be utterly worthless. There was no luck about the house of Dundas, none.

Whereupon Mr. Lee explained that his son Gaynor had lately spent a month prospecting the region of the old silver mine, also in surveying the lands in Pennsylvania, and had brought back a fairly good account of the latter property, which, if held for another ten years, was likely to bring some sort of price. Then Mr. Bickerdyke gave in his statement concerning the Swallowfield estate, both farm and woodland, which in spite of long neglect had been brought into good condition, and had yielded a certain amount of profit. By one o'clock I had signed my name a dozen times, Mr. Bevis, with his habitual exactitude, almost

guiding my pen. Indeed, with these four elderly, rather peremptory gentlemen directing, even dictating, "Here, then, Marcia," "Just there, Marcia," "Not that way, but this way, Marcia," I had never in my life felt more childish.

"Now, then, Miss Marcia Dundas," Mr. Chilton said finally, "your affairs, whether for good or ill, are in your own hands, and by a somewhat striking coincidence the dead hand is off the Dundas property just when its release promises to be most profitable. I am not sure but what your great-grandmother and namesake did the best thing for everybody concerned. You are to be made a rich woman at once."

Mr. Lee took up the subject. Never before in the history of the place had it possessed anything like the same market value.

"The dead hand is lifted just in time," Mr. Chilton reasserted with solemnity.

The matter was all carefully explained and made clear. I could at once sell the house and fifty acres on this side of the river; also thirty acres on the other side of the river, realizing an amount which it would be Mr. Chilton's willingly accepted office prudently to invest in a way which would enable me to live in comfort, still holding one hundred and twenty acres of woodland here, also my Western lands until they should in course of time be sold in a way handsomely to add to my capital.

Mr. Lee handed me the bid made by Wilkins & Meigs in black and white for the house and grounds and pasture land. What they proposed to do was to build a factory on each side of the river, while the larger part of the place was to be cut up into streets and lots, making a village for their working people. The figures were no mean ones. It was a good offer. As I held the paper I was the focus of all eyes.

Then I launched my thunderbolt.

"I have no intention of selling the place," I said.

Every person sitting round the table altered his or her position as I spoke. Some strong feeling made itself felt in the silence. Then Mr. Lee with a little gesture quietly remarked that the offer had been well considered. It was of no use to stand out for a higher price.

"It seems to me quite a splendid offer," I said. "I am not waiting for a higher bid. I could not sell the place." I broke down a little here. "I have had some idea of this, but I could not bring myself to speak out before, for I knew it would almost break Aunt Mary's heart. All the same, I cannot give up the place. Nothing could induce me to give it up."

Aunt Mary had uttered an exclamation, pushed back her chair, and walked to the French windows, wide open to the lawn and gardens lying pleasantly to the sun. Nobody spoke, but

still it was not silence. It was the snap of a long tension. I had an odd sense of hearing something rend and break. This offer for the place had been a secret, but it had been an open secret. Aunt Mary and Lilly all through their six weeks' stay with me had not tried to conceal their elation at this being the end of their long probation in Swallowfield in my behalf. John Pearson, the Bickerdyke factotum, had said to me, with a groan, what was the use of budding roses if they were all to be spoiled by cinders. Wilkins & Meigs already controlled large manufacturing interests in East Swallowfield. I knew their high chimneys belching forth columns of black smoke. I knew the piles of slag that blackened every green thing that grew.

"I could not part with the family place to anybody," I now said; "but to give it up to Wilkins & Meigs would seem like desecration."

"Good for you, Marcia," said Mr. Bickerdyke, with an emphatic nod.

"I always did like you, Marcia," said Mr. Bevis, "and now I love you and offer you my hand in marriage. I will come here to live with you, and we will devote the whole place to beautiful gardens."

What Mr. Chilton did was to gather up certain papers and pass them across to me, pointing to long careful lists of figures.

"You understand, do you not," said he, "that

simply keeping up this house, even without making repairs, costs money?"

"I understand."

Mr. Lee put in his word. "The court was obliged to create some sort of extraordinary fund for your expenses as a minor. What has been spent on your education, your maintenance, your three trips to Europe, was in no respect your actual income. The amount is fully expended."

"She has some foolish plan," Aunt Mary now burst forth with indignation. "Lilly and I have both felt that something was in the air. I could not ask her to confide in me. She knows too well how I regard this place, — as the grave of all her family. My sister's life was a sacrifice to that unjust, that unrighteous will. I myself have suffered from it."

Something intensely keen belonging to the memories of loss and pain thus invoked made itself felt in me. For a moment I hung my head, as if I saw my course as something all wrong. Again silence fell upon the group, and in my humiliation seemed to point at and accuse me. What I had to do, however, was to justify myself, to justify my father, to justify my great-grandmother for tying up the property. So I began: "I know that you have suffered, Aunt Mary, and I am not ungrateful. But try just a little to have faith in me. Try to think how binding, how sacred, all this family history is to me. Try to

remember that all those who came before me loved this place and thought it worth making sacrifices for. Above all, try to believe that it is simply my duty to make a little money and help to keep up the place."

Aunt Mary, standing at the end of the table, gazed piteously first at me and then at Mr. Lee and Mr. Chilton. It was to her a tragic thing.

"But how can you, a mere girl, make money?" Mr. Chilton demanded.

"If instead of being a mere girl I were a young man of twenty-one"—

"But," he interrupted, "that is just it. You are not a young man."

"If I were a young man and told you that I was prepared to use my powers and give the world a few hard knocks, you would not be so scornful and incredulous."

"We are neither scornful nor incredulous. Individually I respect your decision to keep the place, even if I foresee some practical difficulties."

"Mr. Bickerdyke will help me through the practical difficulties."

"I have always hated this place," persisted Aunt Mary. "My poor sister was so unhappy here. For her it represented only poverty and exile."

"Ah, poor mamma! She always declared that my ancestors tyrannized over me just as they did over poor papa." This I confessed half with

laughter and half with tears. "She hated all suggestion of the dead and vanished generations. She had an acute sense of the family doom, — that doom which I long to reverse. She used to say she dared not open a closet door, she was so afraid of the family skeletons that peeped out. She hated the heavy old mahogany furniture that I am so proud of. She would not sleep in the great carved canopied bed in her room. So many people, she pleaded, must have been born in it, so many people must have died in it. You know, Aunt Mary, how she insisted on curling up on a lounge until you sent her a bright little brass bedstead."

"I wonder that you can laugh, Marcia," said Aunt Mary. "I sympathize with her entirely in being oppressed by the gloom of this forsaken old house."

"If I laugh," I answered, "it is because I loved mamma best, and knew her best, and best understand the whole history. She was a brilliant, impressionistic woman, loving luxury. She had the most acute perception, both for pleasure and for pain; she could enjoy more intensely than other people, yet trifles which they pass by made existence abhorrent to her. Articles of furniture used to get on her nerves so that I had to drag them out of sight. Every room she lived in had to be repapered. The mere matter of putting a little meal on a tray for her was a nice matter of

selection and choice. I rummaged the house to find the prettiest bits of china and silver. But what she enjoyed she enjoyed, and when she enjoyed she loved to talk and had an exquisite gift of speech. And often we were perfectly happy here, and the only reason she had for not loving this place was that papa was not here. Without him no place could have contented her. And Aunt Mary, part of the reason that I could not give up the place is because mamma and I had our little time together here. Even if misery did at times huddle close, still we felt the heart-beat of life together."

"I used to dread hearing what might be happening to you both," said Aunt Mary. "You were wonderfully poor and uncomfortable; no servants would stay with you."

"We were poor," I granted, "but I never minded it at the time, — so long as the bills were paid. Indeed, I have come to feel that our poverty taught me the best things I ever learned, — the things that have grown into the very fibre of me. I was not dependent upon luxury, even upon comfort. I never expected to be served, but to serve others, and I had at each turn to exercise my faculty and my will and " —

"And so developed a tolerably tidy one," murmured Mr. Bevis.

Everybody was glad to laugh.

"I have needed it," I said. "Every day of

my life I have needed all my will and all my pride."

I had said too much, but I felt strongly, and words I had never thought of uttering rushed to my lips. I knew very well that my reasons for holding on to the property could not appeal to outsiders. They were a part of my individual conscience. It was a sacred duty. But at this moment, with all those pairs of eyes fixed upon me, it had seemed necessary to make my meaning clear. And now as I paused and glanced from one to the other, putting forth, as it were, interrogative feelers, measuring the impression I had made, it seemed to me that I had carried nobody with me. I turned and looked at Gay — but alas, those eyeglasses hid his eyes. Not even Gay seemed to be convinced that I had right and reason on my side. Then as ever my sense of having my own life to lead, my own soul to answer, came to my aid. I was Marcia Dundas. I was in my own house — at my own table.

"I think luncheon is ready," I said to Aunt Mary, "but have patience a minute more, and let me say that this resolution has been growing in me ever since the day the news came of my father's death. For as my mother lay dying, her ears catching the echoes, as it were, of my father's last words, she said, 'Marcia, it is left to you to carry on the family now.' Even while I sat by her benumbed, frozen with my grief, I made up my

mind to do something, to be something. I'm not clever. Nothing has ever come easily to me. But when I have to do a thing I find somehow the force to accomplish it. Plenty of girls at school surpassed me in rapidity and ease; they took all the prizes. I did not mind; I did not expect prizes. Indeed, knowing how hard I used to work, I was glad that other people had genius. But I could work, and I did work, and after all here I am, twenty-one years old, and I have taken two college degrees, and they have already helped me, together with Mr. Bevis's good services, to secure a place in New York where I am to have at least a hundred dollars a month and all expenses paid."

The crucial moment was over. What had so long been looked forward to with a certain dread was an accomplished fact. Instead of being a child to be dictated to, I had taken my destiny into my own control. I was standing by the table. Everybody came towards me. I hardly knew who was shaking hands with me, kissing me, embracing me; even Gay, tall, slim, enigmatical behind his glasses, was one of them, blushing and stammering a little as he had used to do as a boy. But who was this behind him, taller, broader, flushed to his brown hair, and who fastened upon me a deep gaze out of blue eyes full at the same time of laughter and of tears? Gay was somehow brushed aside by this stranger,

whose large white hand reached impetuously towards mine.

"You do not know me," said the man, "but you may know my name. I am Paul Dundas Chauncey."

He was crushing my hand between both of his, and something of sympathy, of keen emotion, made itself felt in his look and touch, and passed into my whole consciousness like flame.

"If," he went on, "if I was ever in all my life proud of a good name, it is now that it proclaims me your cousin."

"Paul Dundas Chauncey," I repeated, "I am very glad to know that I have a cousin. At first I was puzzled to think how you could possibly have come by that name. Now I see that you are probably descended from my great-great-uncle, Robert Chauncey, whose failure ruined my great-grandfather."

"An unlucky omen," said Paul Chauncey, who still held my hand and kept the straight glance of his blue eyes on my face. "But we must try to defy auguries. Please accept me as a cousin, Miss Marcia Dundas."

"I am glad enough to have a cousin," I returned, wondering how this man had contrived to drop from the skies. It turned out that Mr. Chilton had brought him. He had been familiar with Paul in a professional way for some years, then only yesterday the coincidence of the name

Paul D. Chauncey had struck him, and he inquired what the initial stood for. When he heard that it stood for Dundas, it settled the question of our being collateral relatives, and he decided that we ought to meet, and suggested Paul's taking the place of his stenographer.

We all went out to lunch, and I found that the hamper under which I had seen Gay staggering held champagne, in which they all drank to my good health, to my coming of age — also to the big fortune I was to make. Indeed, they all laughed a good deal about "Marcia's fortune," and I laughed with them, not trying to explain that I had no hope or wish to make a "fortune," as people call a fortune nowadays. The Dundases had never been rich according to the modern sense of the term. What I admired and what I should choose out of all conditions would be the large, simple, methodical life traditionally practiced here, with a consummate economy investing each detail. Mr. Bevis described what was to be my new occupation, and gave a sketch of Miss Winifred Keogh, who had lately come into an enormous amount of property, with which she knew not how to grapple, hence required my aid. They drank her health and frankly expressed the hope that she would pass the fortune she did not want "on to Marcia." Everybody seemed to accept the situation with frank pleasure. Aunt Mary defined me as "the modern woman." "A

modern woman," she went on to say, "has to be just herself; she desires to know; she is eager for work; she insists on being spared nothing, but insists on putting between herself and the old-fashioned woman's ideas of happiness all the tiresome prerogatives and responsibilities of a man."

"Nothing would induce me to be a modern woman," she declared.

"But let us drink to the health of the modern woman," said Mr. Bevis, running round the table to clink his glass against mine. "I may not exactly wish to be a modern woman myself, but sometimes, as at present, I like to be as near a modern woman as possible."

CHAPTER II

"MY PRAYER BEFORE THE ALTARS"

"I AM afraid you do not quite believe in me yet," said Paul Chauncey. "You see I was realizing you all the time you were talking to Mr. Chilton and the others, and all the while I listened, all that I had ever believed in and longed to fight for seemed to be taking shape before my eyes. What I have missed always is something or somebody to show me the better life, the nobler desire. Now you have shown it."

I passed by the flattery except that it evinced a generous quality of sympathy. I was proud of this new cousin. There was a certain magnetism about his personality which at once made him seem familiar. He had a strong, well-defined face, with a very full forehead and temples, deeply set blue eyes, a closely-cropped brown mustache which did not hide his straight firm lips, and a square chin. He had said little while we were at table, but joined me as we rose (when the elders had gone back ostensibly to assort their papers, practically, no doubt, to discuss "Marcia" and "Marcia's plans"), and asked me to show him the house. He was at once interested in the huge,

bare book-room with its empty shelves, for the great law and belles-lettres library had been sold half a century before, and what remained was the mere flotsam and jetsam of literature. But the chairs and tables and secretaries and davenports were, no matter what their state of disrepair, all of beautiful work. The great drawing-room was more habitable, for brown holland coverings hid the decayed tapestries and once richly brocaded stuffs, and the Watteau-like pictures on the wall-paper still showed the gracefulness of their garlands, of their Cupids, and their beribboned shepherdesses. He liked the hall with its oaken beams and panelings, and found the staircase with its three landings really beautiful. He was interested in the portraits, and told me what I had often heard before, that I resembled his great-great-aunt (and my great-grandmother) Marcia Chauncey. Although there was nothing in our talk worth setting down here, it was on the basis of established kinship, of instant friendship, of easy intimacy. He admired the house, which in spite of neglect and disrepair was so well built it would, as he said, last till doomsday.

"It would have been a horrible sacrifice to have given it over to those people," he said. "Not but that I am afraid I should have jumped at their offer. The moment you spoke out your mind I saw everything in a different light, and it seemed an ugly and a crooked thing to despoil the ghosts

of one's ancestors. You see I have been a waif and a stray all my life. My experience has been to long to get rid of all impedimenta."

We had come to the door which overlooked the garden, and seeing Gay and Lilly down the path, we strolled after them. Paul talked freely about himself: declared that he was, so far, a failure; since up to the time of his mother's death, five years before, the necessity for earning his own living had seemed so remote it was not worth thinking about. "She was so rich?" I asked. Then he told me that his father had held one foreign consulate after another, and he, Paul, had been born in Tangier thirty-one years before. He was less than five years old when his father died, leaving his mother with her two children (Grace being eighteen months older than Paul) very poor. However, Mrs. Chauncey had soon married again, and this time an Englishman named Ellis, a man of large property; and upon his death, ten years later, his widow had a handsome income secured by her settlements. Grace had married well, and was now Mrs. Warren Chester of New York. Paul had already been admitted to the bar, and ever since his mother's death, which came quite suddenly and unexpectedly, had been trying to make a living out of his profession. His bent had always been literary, and so long as she had lived his mother had humored him. He frankly declared to me

now that he disliked the law; that Mr. Chilton would tell me that no young man could get on nowadays unless he gave himself heart and soul to some corporation. Nevertheless he had to go on until he found some other outlet for his energies, because he continued to make enough by his practice to pay for his food and drink, a roof to cover him, and a decent suit of clothes to go about in. All this was told with spirit and a touch of humor. He confessed that he did not feel that he was fitted to be a good lawyer: he had n't a legal mind. He had lived too much abroad when he was young, and American life tired him. It was too big a thing, everybody was so rich, so well able to buy the best thing and do the most expensive thing. "We had all, my mother, Grace, and I, a little bit of the bohemian in us," he declared. He looked so well dressed, so prosperous, so indefinably stamped with the mark of good family and good society, that I accepted his confession of the touch of bohemianism for what it was worth. It interested me that his bent was towards literature, and when I alluded to this he said his passion was for the theatre, and that his one burning ambition was to write a successful play.

He had spoken of himself with such amazing frankness that when he turned and asked me what I was intending to do I felt it to be a fault to have nothing to communicate. I had declared to

everybody my intention of making money to keep up the place, but I was not yet quite ready to explain just how I expected to make the money. First I was to catalogue the Keogh collection. I would confess to no other plan of life. Paul had such an air of easy mastery of things that, compared with his certainty, my aspirations seemed the blindest grope. However, he said with what seemed to me wonderful sagacity, —

"You mean to write."

From the first there was in Paul a something of understanding, of sympathy which it seemed to me I had never found in anybody else. We were of the same blood; we were somehow of the same stamp: so we both explained it.

But this first meeting was a brief one. Mr. Chilton came out presently, and he frankly gave his own account of Paul, who by one of the freaks of the whirligig of time stood here with me in the old garden. According to Mr. Chilton, Paul was the very fellow to outstrip all competitors: just let him once show his grit and he could get one of the good places with some corporation, and his fortune was made. "I hope seeing you will rouse the old Chauncey ambition in him, Marcia," Mr. Chilton went on. "A man has got to be successful nowadays or he is nothing. This fellow calls it commercialism, but it is successful commercialism which brings a sense of power. I advise him to choose a line and stick to it; if he hates

corporations, let him go in for civic reform and all that. He is clever enough for anything, and will soon get all the clients he wants."

But they had to take the 4.36 train. The wagon had come for them.

"I knew you would be glad to see Chauncey, Marcia," said Mr. Chilton. "I knew that the relationship was sure to count with you. Most of us pray to be delivered from our relations."

"Particularly from our poor relations," Paul struck in.

Mr. Bevis also came to bid me good-by.

"Is n't she like the young eaglet standing on the edge of the nest?" he said, turning to the group. "I long to see the flight she will make when her wings unfold." Which bit of rhetoric almost vexed me, for remembering now in cold blood the vaunts I had made of my own prowess, I felt awkward, ineffective, dumb. After Mr. Chilton, Mr. Bevis, and Paul Chauncey had gone, I still went on pacing the terrace walk, all my resolutions seeming a parcel of vain strivings. The sun shone out of the orange-colored west like a ball of vermilion sealing wax; the golden haze transmuted all things, and the reddening and yellowing trees seemed to hold as much light as the luminary itself. Aunt Mary and Lilly had gone to drive with Mrs. Lee and Lucy. I was left for the moment quite alone with a feeling of spent effort, of exhausted surprises. A gulf seemed

to yawn between this afternoon and the magical suggestions of the morning. That intoxicating sense of what existence stood to me for, the wonderful dream of what I was to make of my own life, was stilled by the thought that so many others, my father among them, must have walked along this path asking of the future what it was never to give them. The stillness, the intense luminousness burning in the flowers, the leaves, the bright red hips of the roses, gleaming indeed out of the great windows of the house as the sun rounded to the west — all spoke to me.

Mr. Bickerdyke, Mr. Lee, and Gay came out.

"Just think," I called, "what I might be feeling if I had doomed all this to destruction."

Now that their sense of responsibility in the matter was over I was sure enough of having them all on my side, for my acceptance of the manufacturers' offer would have meant the deterioration of the whole neighborhood.

"It would have been hideous, hideous," Mr. Lee conceded. "Still, Marcia, it would have meant a handsome sum of money for you."

"M-m-money is not everything," said Gay, stammering in his eagerness.

"Money is a very important factor in life for everybody," Mr. Lee insisted, "and particularly for a woman. It appalls me to think of the burden you are assuming, Marcia."

I put out my hand and patted Mr. Bickerdyke's sleeve.

"He will help me," I said. I walked on with Mr. Bickerdyke, for I wished to see what his sister, Miss Hester, thought of me to-day, for she kept the conscience of the neighborhood. Mr. Lee went home, but Gay had joined me as we crossed the lawn. Although my house fronted on a different street, Mr. Lee's and Mr. Bickerdyke's places were both in contact with it, and all communicated by a stile. Mr. Bickerdyke liked to preach little sermons, and now discoursed to me.

"Of course I will go on running the farm for you, Marcia. I have got everything into good working order, and I should hate to give it up to somebody who would spoil it all. I think you are doing right, Marcia. You feel it your duty to keep the place in the family, and any disloyalty to duty has its effect upon character. What you have in your mind as to your future career of course I do not wholly understand, but I hope you do. Make a clear definite decision as to what you can do. Look facts exactly in the face. Give up what you cannot afford to spend time and effort upon, and bear well what has to be borne. The important thing is to dismiss vanity; to be honest and sincere in estimating your place in the world, accepting cheerfully what you actually deserve. Old Apollonius of Tyana uttered a prayer which, old pagan though he was, is a good

one for Christians to lay to heart. 'My prayer before the altars is, grant me, ye gods, what is my due!' The trouble with most Christians is that they demand not what is their due, but what they desire, and what will flatter their vanity. Pray not for what you may fancy, but what is right and just for you to have, that will rob no one else. If we keep humble and pray hard enough we are likely to get, if not what we ask for, at least as much as is good for us."

I was used to Mr. Bickerdyke's homilies and liked them. Although they were Episcopalians, he and his sister had, like most New Englanders, something of Plymouth Rock in their composition. I liked their stern Puritanism, also a sort of homeliness in them both, a certain simplicity of aim, a consistent adherence to an ideal of prudence and thrift, which meant so much cleanliness, nicety, and tranquillity that it satisfied a high standard of taste.

Miss Hester with her dark hair well sprinkled with white, her dark eyes and clearly cut features, dressed as ever in gray, was sitting on the porch, reading, as we approached, and Mr. Bickerdyke called out to her that Marcia was not going to sell the place. Miss Hester was glad, she said. She shook hands with me in her serious way, even kissed me. Jerusha, her woman servant, who had known me from a child, came out and also signified that she approved of me.

"Marcia is determined to cut into the world's loaf for herself," said Mr. Bickerdyke.

"But what are you going to do?" demanded Miss Hester, always with that little coldness of manner which seemed a part of her distinctive personality, like the punctilious nicety of her dress, always of the finest texture but without color.

Nobody confided dreams to Miss Hester, but I told her how I had, as a stop-gap, taken a position where I was required to catalogue a great collection of antiques, curios, and other bric-a-brac.

"But what do you know about such things, Marcia?" said Miss Hester.

Well, I knew little or nothing, but happily I knew how to study and hoped to read up and learn. I explained that I was to settle down quietly with Miss Keogh in a house on ——th Street near Riverside Drive. Miss Hester did not know New York, and inquired if I should be near my aunt and my other friends.

"Marcia has got her work laid out before her," said Mr. Bickerdyke, "and will find friends too expensive a luxury to be indulged in at present. She needs to make a miser of herself and put her strength into her own life. If one is to accomplish anything in this world one must give up friends. They rob us of more than they give us; they not only take time and service, but we are hampered

by the feeling that we have to come up to their idea of us."

Miss Hester demurred a little: some friends were helpful, her niece Dorothy, for example; but Mr. Bickerdyke considered it a lucky circumstance that Dorothy was not in New York, but on the other side of the water.

"The great thing you have to do, Marcia," Mr. Bickerdyke went on, "is so to order your life that you may get hold of your own powers. To find out one's powers and to exert them to the best advantage is the highest attainment of a human being. I do not want you to make a bungle of your life, Marcia."

The Bickerdykes were good allies. I was glad to have them on my side, but how little in this late dreamy afternoon did I feel the assurance of the morning. I took my way home, Gay still keeping by my side, and I was glad to have him. Whether I made a huge success of life or a superb failure, Gay was Gay, and I was I. John Pearson came up to us just as we reached the stile. John was Jerusha's husband and the Bickerdykes' man of all work. He, too, held out his hand, and, by the fire in his eye and the strength of his grip, I knew that he was well pleased with me that day.

"I always said, Marcia," he remarked with real condescension, "that whether you was handsome or not, or smart or not, I liked you as a critter."

"Much obliged to you, John."

"I told Jerusha all the time," John continued, now addressing Gay, "that Miss Marcia Dundas was none of the new trash who care simply about money and money's worth. I helped bring her up just as I helped bring you up, Gay, and I am proud of my work."

Still, proud as I was of John Pearson's good opinion, my heroic mood was over. As we drew near the house I said to Gay: —

"I read somewhere lately that a friend of the old Empress of Austria was once exclaiming to her majesty over the magnificence of her diamond tiara, of her ropes of pearls, of her necklace and stomacher of brilliants, and the answer the empress made was: 'When these things are brought for me to put on I feel like a horse that has to be bridled and saddled.'"

Gay turned his mysterious eyeglasses and his droll little mustache towards me.

"The th-th-thought of all you have taken upon yourself oppresses you, Marcia," he said. "I don't like your being saddled and bridled with such heavy obligations."

I had told the anecdote to please myself. It surprised me to see how acute and clever Gay must be to have taken in my meaning.

"I do not know where my courage has gone," I now confessed, "but with Mr. Bickerdyke's taking all those fine things in me for granted I

feel like a balloon coming down in collapse." Then I made haste to say, "Not but that I am resolute to do what I have set out to do; I only hate to have talked about it so freely."

Gay's eyeglasses were looking at me. I was becoming conscious of a curious self-possession in him. Really it was quite absurd how he was growing up. We had approached the house.

"Marcia, I wish you would walk down to the river with me," he now said with peculiar wistfulness.

I liked to go, and said so. The sun was not far above the horizon as we walked along the terrace and down the slope to the orchard, and then through the orchard into the lane. As he held the gate open I said, "You are getting to be so tall, Gay! Don't you remember how big I used to be in comparison with you and Lucy?"

He colored to his hair. "I suppose," he returned, "I must always be a year younger than you, Marcia. I must seem to you like a boy. I don't loom up to your imagination. But little f-fellows f-finally take a start and become men."

"Yes, indeed. I am almost five feet seven, but I can see as we walk on together that you are at least two inches taller" —

"I should be quite satisfied," Gay now remarked with an air of exquisite composure, "if we could be on a level, — if we could walk on shoulder to shoulder. I should like to have

you accept me just as a good c-c-comrade, Marcia."

I replied cordially that we had been comrades always. "How many times do you suppose," I went on, "we have walked here just this way, with Dorothy and Lucy behind, and Carlo and Flossy running on in front?"

This kindling sense of the years I had spent here as a child with my mother when we children used to play together all the year round made my heart come back to me. What I began to experience as I looked at the fields and pastures and the swelling uplands which rose to the line of woods was a surge of joy that the greater part of what came under my eyes was mine, — that I had not to miss what my father had so loved all his life. It was breathlessly still as we walked on in silence, so that we could hear the tinkle of the water and the swish of the long willow boughs as they swayed and swirled in the side currents.

"Marcia," Gay began, "I want to talk to you about your f-future" —

I had my eyes on the forest which bounded the distance, and I was saying to myself that before I went to New York I must walk through the wood on some morning when the ground was strewn with red and yellow leaves. I was thinking of this so ardently that I did not at first take in Gay's words; so he spoke again, and this

time laid a compelling hand on my arm. Even now as I write this down the whole picture comes up clearly before me; in front of us the bridge which spanned the Swallow River; on either hand wide pastures. I can see myself, Marcia, in the white duck frock I had worn all day, hatless, warm, flushed, with my hair tumbling about my face. I can see Gay, tall, slim, blond, dressed with scrupulous elegance and with a certain fastidiousness, not to say superciliousness, in his look and demeanor further set off by the eyeglasses and the upcurled mustache.

"Of course," he was saying, "I am a mere boy, but in a year I shall be twenty-one, and after that the difference in our ages need not count."

I gazed back at his eyeglasses, musing, wondering dreamily why he harped on this subject. "Then of course," he added modestly, "when I am twenty-one I come in for Uncle Gaynor's property."

It began to seem clear that Gay wished somehow to help me. Could it be he wished to help me financially?

"Besides," he proceeded, "as soon as I finish at Harvard I am to have that appointment in Forestry, and I tell you, Marcia, that with Uncle Gaynor's money it would give us a fairly good income to start with."

We were by this time midway across the

bridge, and here he stopped short and grasped both my hands.

"Marcia," he faltered, with peculiar earnestness, "I do so wish to sp-sp-spare you."

"Spare me what?" I said sharply.

"Spare you the feeling that you have got to do it all yourself. Why, Marcia, what could you do, what could any girl do, that would pay enough to keep up this great property? What you are to earn is only the merest stipend."

"Is it only men who can make money?" I said.

"A man has every sort of career before him — a woman is so much more circumscribed."

"That is the most old-fashioned idea. Women do all sorts of money-making things nowadays."

"Well, what?"

"Look at singers."

"But you have not the requisite voice for the stage."

He had me there. I certainly had not.

"Well, the theatrical stage," I suggested.

"I sincerely hope, Marcia," Gay said in a low voice, "that you will never have the ambition to become an actress."

"You predict that I should fail? I see you do not believe in me."

"All my life long, Marcia," he murmured in my ear, "I have believed that you could do everything better than other people. But I do not want you to go on the stage."

"Don't be alarmed. Nothing could tempt me unless I could easily be the greatest of all actresses," I frankly conceded.

"Well, what then?" he asked anxiously. "Do you think of writing novels?"

"Well, what objection should you have to that?"

"Any success means uphill work and a solitary fight which leaves one faint and weary." Gay gave an abrupt sigh. "Marcia, I cannot bear to think of your having to work on against all kinds of discouragement and with every sort of competition. Tell me if you really hope to make a fortune by writing."

"Please, Gay, do let me keep some of my aspirations to myself. I have done nothing to-day but boast of what I have not yet achieved. I had to take a sort of stand before them all, don't you see, Gay? Now I long to hide myself. Somehow I have to do my work, and please God it shall be done. I do wish you could believe in me, if ever so little, Gay. That would help me."

There was an odd little catch in his voice.

"Believe in you? When you were talking to-day I was ready to fall on my knees. I long to do everything for you myself, but I love your splendid impulse."

"I have to do it all myself," I said. "Nobody can help me."

"Trust me," said Gay. "I love this place just as much as you do."

"You could not possibly love it as I do. It is *my* place; it is *my* life."

I had drawn my hands away from his some time before, and we had been separated, until I said this, by half the length of the bridge. Now he came straight up to me, —

"You are always too proud, Marcia. But a proud woman even more than others needs a haven. Let me offer you that haven of protection, of safety. Of course it would have to be a long engagement."

"A long engagement!"

It came upon me with an instantaneous flash of enlightenment that Gay was making a proposal of marriage. It was fine in him. I appreciated it. I loved him for it. I spared his feelings. I told him that I did not intend to marry, had definitely decided never to marry; that my life would offer no time for such things; that what I coveted was the leisure of mind and opportunity which could only come with absolute emancipation from all love-making and romance. I said to him that I could understand how Lucy's engagement (Lucy was Gay's twin sister and was making a brilliant marriage, and her wedding was to come off on the tenth of October) had put such ideas into his head. And I extolled his delicacy, his chivalrous feeling, his real manli-

ness. I told him that it perhaps needed just this to cement our friendship, that hereafter I should feel that his friendship had been put to the test and had not been found wanting.

He took it all, not without wincing. More than once he colored hotly, seemed about to speak, then, as it were, swallowed down his contradiction and listened as if to weigh the force of my every word. When I had freed myself of every commonplace that entered my mind, Gay said, simply, —

"I know I seem young to you, but let me tell you, Marcia, that already this has been long in my heart, and it always will be in my heart. You have only to put out your hand — remember that, dear! — and you will always find me just like this."

"Thank you, dear Gay." I put out my hand and shook his frankly.

"Could n't we sit down here together," he asked, "just in the old way?"

I was glad to sit down quietly. The water beneath, running brightly over the pebbles, ran with the old mysterious babble that took a sort of rhythm. I had long loved the sound, and to sit there and listen, side by side, with Gay, had its effect upon me. Curiously enough, while we sat low thunder began to mutter behind the hills in the west.

CHAPTER III

THE LATE NICHOLAS KEOGH

YEARS before, when Mr. Bevis had been librarian in one of the great libraries in New York, he had happened to know a man with a good deal of reputation as a "working politician," one Nicholas Keogh. "He came first to inquire if there were any such things as books of reference, and when I had, so to speak, given him the tip, and he found out that ever since the beginning of time men had been busy trying to answer every sort of conundrum, and in putting down each his solution of the mystery of things on stone, and wood, and vellum, and on paper, he became insatiable. He was getting hold of a lot of money, and, perhaps feeling that it was dirty stuff, was ambitious to put it into some sort of shape he need not be ashamed of. He did not, perhaps, begin with a clear notion of making a collection of curiosities, but coming upon a thing or two which seemed interesting and valuable, he gradually got into touch with the dealers and began to believe it was as good a hobby-horse as another. Perhaps having made his money out of the public he salved his conscience by think-

ing he might ultimately give it back to them in a way to show that he had robbed them for their own good. Of course," Mr. Bevis proceeded, "I lost sight of him when I went to High Elms to live, but half a dozen times he wrote and asked me to come down and look at something he hesitated about. He had not much faith in dealers or in so-called experts. He began to believe, after a time, that he could tell a good thing when he saw it, as well as another, and with my help he had studied up antiquities not a little. At first his fancy was for the Japanese; — then he found superior efficacy in old Chinese work, until he fell in love with everything Indian. Finally he even took a fancy to a few specimens of the Ninevite and the Egyptian. Still all the time he was in the way of picking up a few modern things, from the ancient Greek down. How authentic some of the trash actually is will have to be considered later."

Mr. Bevis had already described Mr. Keogh as one of the most useful men in the whole political machine, although he never in his life ran for office. He had other and better paying things to do, running the men who were in office for all they were worth. He was a keen worker: he consecrated his talent to keeping the power in the right place. "Every corporation he had anything to do with gave him chances by the barrel, and if he made his hatful of money out of each

barrel, why, he felt he had richly earned it," continued Mr. Bevis. "For when a special man was needed to carry out a certain purpose, Nick Keogh was sure to be that useful man. Whether or not he understood Chinese mythology, he did understand practical politics. He was inside of everything; had his finger on the button of every enterprise that needed to be promoted, knew the strong and the weak side of everything and everybody; knew how to strengthen the weak and weaken the strong, if that suited him, or weaken the weak and strengthen the strong if that were his programme. What might have been a sore temptation to an honest man was to him a legitimate opportunity. He knew his worth and knew his own price, and when the price was paid was willing to work his way up to the throne of Heaven or down through the gates of Hell. The fact was he knew the secret of getting an income out of everything going that did not bear having the light let in on it."

All this time the late Mr. Keogh had been supporting his mother and sister who lived in Buffalo. He had no other family. Mrs. and Miss Keogh had gratefully accepted a small allowance, little guessing what a fraction it represented of his great income. His mother had died eight months before, and when he went to her funeral he remarked to his sister that she had better settle up her affairs in Buffalo and come to

New York and keep house for him. Then in six weeks he himself had been mortally stricken.

"I've made no will. I supposed I was good for twenty years yet," he said to Miss Keogh, who had obeyed the hasty summons to his bedside. "It all goes to you, Winnie. There are no other heirs. I only wonder what you will do with it."

That was all. He soon passed into unconsciousness, and died next day; and the shabby, scared little woman, in her deep mourning for her mother, entered into possession. She had been wholly in the dark concerning her brother's means, and had supposed that the two hundred dollars which for many years her mother had received at the beginning of each month (thriftily putting by at least fifty), had been a generous proportion of his earnings. She managed to go through the requisite forms to enable her to administer the estate, but, these preliminaries over, she had declined all other help. She was afraid of men. Besides, the amount of her brother's wealth terrified her, she dreaded lest it should be proclaimed. More and more the sense of these mysterious riches had loomed up before her imagination! What did they represent? How could her brother have contrived to gather together such an accumulation of property? She found among his papers half a dozen letters from Mr. Bevis, and the tone of these

emboldened her to send for him. To him she defined her urgent need of help, and this was the circumstance which worked out the result of my being established by the first of October, in the great house on ——th Street, just off Riverside Drive.

Miss Winifred Keogh was thirty-seven years of age, seventeen years younger than her brother Nicholas, six brothers and sisters between them having died in childhood. She was slender, of medium height, with a sad, eager little face, her dark eyes set rather closely together, her thick dark hair parted in the middle and combed smoothly down over her temples and behind her ears. She talked little, but was attentive to everything said to her, and she had a look and manner which suggested a transparent purity and honesty.

A manservant admitted me when I came. I found that she had retained her brother's household, which consisted of the man Andrew and his wife Eunice. Miss Keogh was waiting to receive me, and herself led me straight up to the rooms she had expressly refurnished on my account, with paper and chintzes and rugs all bright with bunches of roses, and a little lace-canopied brass bedstead.

"I wished," Miss Keogh said earnestly, "to have your first impressions of the house pleasant." She gave a little shiver. "My poor brother had a strange taste. It is gloomy downstairs."

I did not see the "collection" that night, but I was ready to admire the dining-room, where we ate our dinner off a round table of redwood, the four shaded candles in the massive silver candlesticks in the centre making the flame burn down into the glittering polished surface with the light of so many rubies. The crystal and silver outside of this lighted circle also gave flashes and gleams which were repeated by the splendid fittings of the sideboard and buffet. When I spoke of the beautiful effect Miss Keogh answered: —

"I do not know what else to do with these things except to use them for the time being."

The dining-room was on the second floor and the library adjoined it, and she led me there when we rose from the table. Books always have a familiar homey look, and one did not need to object to the rich bookcases which ran round the room, nor to the urns of bronze and the marble busts above. We sat down side by side on a big, springy, roomy sofa, and Miss Keogh began at once to talk in a clear low voice.

"I hope that you are ready to enter into my views, Miss Dundas, and to help me. My brother's death left me with unexpected responsibilities. I had never supposed him to be a rich man. Even now I seem to be unable to take in the fact of his wealth. It has been no easy matter to get to the end of the securities he held. Although I have been working for months at his

books and papers, I am every now and then startled to find that there is still another deposit, another list of investments."

There being no indication in her look or manner that this was a matter of congratulation, — rather one saw that at the mention of more money she winced as at the recurrence of a pain, — I said nothing. She told me that it was wholly impossible that her brother had intended she should inherit; that death coming like a thief in the night had robbed him of the chance to make a will. He might have had dreams of endowing richly a school or a college, a library or a hospital. He had been good to his mother and to her, and she believed that in some corner of his heart he had kept a place for generous dreams and hopes for his fellow-beings. And as soon as she could decide what it was best to do with all these possessions she would willingly pass them on to those for whom they were really gathered.

"My wish," she said, with her soft, clear emphasis, "is to live as frugally as I have lived all my life. My own tastes are simple to the verge of austerity, but besides that I should have no pleasure in spending this money. I could never feel that it belonged to me. However, I do not wish to show a niggardly spirit. If I economize too much for your comfort, Miss Dundas, if I do not have the table sufficiently substantial and attractive, I wish you to tell me so frankly."

I promised to do so. I began to perceive that here was as nice a case of conscience as might be. Here was a woman with unexpected riches thrust upon her who found only a scruple. It was only by degrees that I took in the absolute candor and simplicity of Miss Keogh's repugnance to all this wealth, but from the first she made me understand that she considered her present position only a stewardship. I asked no questions: I waited to have her define herself. She began presently to talk about the collection which took up all the first floor of the house, upon which I was to spend six hours a day in preparing a *catalogue raisonné*. At present, she observed, it was such a miscellaneous jumble she waited to have it put into some sort of shape. Then she could better decide how it was to be distributed. I did venture to ask what form of disposition was in her mind. Was it to be offered for sale? For sale? Oh never! not for worlds would she sell one single piece of the collection. But if it should be decided that the collection, or rather series of collections, could do any good, answer any sort of educational purpose, it was to be given away.

"I do not know what you will think of it, Miss Dundas," Miss Keogh added. "To me it seems wicked."

CHAPTER IV

"NICK KEOGH'S CURIOSITY SHOP"

My first feeling in being confronted with "Nick Keogh's Curiosity Shop" was that it represented the spoliation of pagodas, mosques, temples, cathedrals, and palaces. My second feeling was that for me, an ignorant girl, to have undertaken properly to label, date, and classify the collection showed a presumption which made me feel like beating my head against the wall. What enabled me to take breath, and to hold on to my engagement, was that Miss Keogh agreed to my suggestion that I should send for Mr. Bevis and Mr. Bickerdyke and ask their advice. Miss Keogh had lived like a cloistered nun: she had seen even her brother only a few times in all her life. She mistrusted men by instinct, and her chief idea in making me a member of her household was that I could be the barrier interposed between herself and the big, brutal, masculine world outside, that puts questions and insists on answers, settles points and lays down laws. She was a timid soul, yet she had laid invincible hold of certain ideas, knew the result she desired to arrive at, and wished to reach it in her own way.

She consented that Mr. Bevis and Mr. Bickerdyke should come and go provided she did not have to see them. She saw them, nevertheless, for after being half an hour in the house, Mr. Bickerdyke insisted that it was his duty to go upstairs and pay his respects to her, and did so accordingly. She had already met Mr. Bevis, so it was not long before she seemed to find some faint satisfaction in the feeling that I had good advisers. She would listen to the conversation of the two men, and if she did not reply at the time was apt to bring up what they had said in her talk to me, and would make comments upon it.

Mr. Bevis frankly admired the tremendous aggregation of curios and art objects. For several days he and I spent our time wandering up and down the silent lofty rooms which seemed lighted less from out of doors than from the shining surfaces of lacquer, enamel, and burnished metal. There were great temple lamps with eyes which we liked to set aglow; there were tall vases of dragon china; Moorish hanging lamps of copper, with panes of glass so richly jeweled that they glowed like gems; there were huge brass and copper braziers into which we threw lighted incense twigs, and sandal-wood chests and boxes which gave out mysterious perfumes. There were gorgeous screens with flights of birds across a background of gold, or

flowers emblazoned on a field of azure. There were rugs of all kinds from Aubusson to those of India. But a great part of the collection was made up of images of different creatures more or less sacred. There were gods in wood, in bronze, in marble, in ivory, in ebony. There were images of Buddha, dragons of the most wonderful size and hideousness, birds, too, and serpents. All the garniture of shrines was there; temple lamps, incense burners, tall candlesticks, and one beautiful screen of twelve panels in jade, carved with figures and scenes from Chinese mythology. There was even a mummy, and there were two sphinxes.

But I will not try to re-catalogue it here. It was, as Mr. Bevis called it, "Nick Keogh's Curiosity Shop," into which he had dumped whole invoices of goods apparently with the feeling that he must not let a possible good thing escape him. With Mr. Bevis to direct my attention to the carvings in ivory, in jade, the wonderful intricacies of Japanese bird and flower life in bronze, I soon woke up to the worth of the direct impression, and to some sense of enjoyment in the task I had undertaken. If by day the lofty silent rooms seemed to hold inexplicable alien forms of life, some of them hardly emerged out of the early chaos of grotesque and monstrous shapes, almost undetached from the bulk of the material they had grown out of,

towards evening, when the electric bulbs began to glow, some sort of meaning, even of consecutiveness, made itself felt. What was by day chiefly weird and uncanny grew alive. The temple lamps glowed, the eyes of the idols flickered and gleamed, the most delicate gemlike tints burned in the enamels, and the brasses and coppers gave out wonderful reflections.

But, as Mr. Bevis said, however one took in the direct appeal of the fantastic beauty of many of the articles in the collection, the chief wonder one all the time experienced was as to what Nick Keogh had tried to do, what sort of blind aim was behind this assemblage of strange deities. Did he simply want the biggest and most expensive fad? Did he intend to live with these things? Or was it his idea that after getting hold of so much of the public money it would be a handsome way of salving his conscience, and making amends, to give it back in these bizarre shapes?

"And the salvation that lies in great art," Mr. Bevis went on to say, "is that no matter whether the collector has an idea in his mind or whether he simply wishes to show that he has mastered the trick, and knows how to spend his money like a gentleman, the collection he has made goes beyond his shallow soundings and carries with it its own reason for being. It comes to represent the supremely imaginative ideas that belong to humanity."

Mr. Bevis said this to Miss Keogh who, listened attentively, but shook her head.

Mr. Bickerdyke, who did not care so much about art and liked always to find a possible moral meaning bound up in everything, now offered the results of his own ponderings over the meanings of the collection. He had decided to his own satisfaction that Mr. Keogh's intention in gathering together these historic fragments had been to show the ultimate triumph of the Christian religion.

Mr. Bevis was struck by this suggestion. It was at least a good working hypothesis. "That will do, Marcia," he said; "you can work it up as a study of the different religions."

"The different religions?" put in Miss Keogh, her whole look and tone evincing her constant shocked sense of dislike towards the graven images. "There can be but one religion."

"You are like the man in Fielding's novel," said Mr. Bevis, "with his 'When I speak of religion I mean the Christian religion, and when I speak of the Christian religion I mean the Church of England as by law established.'"

"I have no real objection to the Church of England," was Miss Keogh's chilly reply; "but by belief and profession I am a Scotch Presbyterian."

Mr. Bevis enjoyed this answer; Mr. Bickerdyke admired it. All these discussions helped to

break the ice between Miss Keogh and my two advisers. They were both interested in the phenomenon of a rich woman without an atom of worldliness, whose first and last idea in coming into this unexpected wealth was to dispossess herself of it. There was high unction and mysterious force in her attitude of willing renunciation, and her very silence as to her exact intentions carried weight. Both men felt a personal appeal in the delicacy of the fragile figure, in the sadness of the pale, eager little face, in her few reluctant words which showed a yearning for the redemption of the whole human family. They were willing, indeed anxious, to help her, to advise her, but somehow were balked by the difficulty of arriving at an arbitrary judgment of what would be good enough for her. She sat upstairs chiefly in a little room off the library, — where her brother had kept his books and gone over his accounts, — reading the letters which came to her in shoals, and brooding over some sort of beautiful impossible schemes of benevolence which should have the result of lifting the average of human happiness and goodness.

Meantime I shut myself up with the collection with a dogged determination to read a definite meaning into it and make the fantastic experiment comprehensible.

"Set the images all in a row as it were, and work up," was Mr. Bevis's advice, while Mr.

Bickerdyke's clear and salient note was always for the ultimate goal of the search after the Infinite Idea. Something broad and convincing in this method of treatment carried its own force. Miss Keogh waived the point and only desired to have the hideous monsters that made her seem to break the first commandment cleared out of the way, and finally I could set at the task I had undertaken with some zeal, seeming to see something definite and intelligible loom out of the chaos. I soon began to enjoy the task of working up from the deities of the earliest, most rudimentary period, whose shapes were hardly separated from the wood and stone which held them, and of watching the development of heavy inert forms into the almost living, breathing, moving figures of the Greeks. This clear central motive at times not only eluded me, but might have been in danger of vanishing altogether had I not seized it, as it were, and held it fast. This dominant idea was indeed far too important to be let go.

Miss Keogh had engaged me to catalogue the collection, and I at first supposed that, in dedicating myself to the work and disregarding everything else, I was performing my whole duty. After spending most of the hours of the day in the rooms downstairs I studied all the evening, consulting the books of reference with which the library abounded, and making notes. I had

agreed to give Miss Keogh six hours of the day, and as six hours are but a fraction of the twenty-four I had expected to reserve some fair proportion of time for myself.

> "Six hours to law, to soothing slumbers seven,
> Ten to the world allot, and all to Heaven,"

has generally been accepted as a suitable distribution of the hours of the day. But instead of to Heaven I was soon in danger of giving all my twenty-four hours to Miss Keogh. She had frequently talked to me about the letters she was constantly receiving, also about her personal interviews with people whom she could not avoid who tried to interest her in their necessities or in their schemes; at first artlessly and plaintively, again with sympathy, finally with indignation. She had all this money to spend: she longed to spend it in the best way. "Don't you think," she said to me in one of the early days of my initiation, "that it is better to go straight to the poor people themselves and find out exactly what they need?"

I was ready to assent.

"I have belonged for years," she went on, "to several charitable societies, and I know how charitable societies are managed. Probably they are managed in the best possible way. Still, it has seemed to me that if one could take individual men and women and try to give them the means

to lead clean and wholesome lives it would not only make them happier, but better. The only possible compensation for enduring the responsibility of wealth would be, it seems to me, to let no man, woman, or child that it is possible to reach go hungry, naked, or cold."

She had at first hoped and believed that careful attention to the letters she received day after day would give her this opportunity. The news was beginning to spread abroad that here was a warm-hearted and unworldly woman, set down in the midst of her brother's accumulations, without any clear idea of how to dispossess herself of them. It touched a sore place in the world's consciousness that the golden shower had fallen on this little, quiet, plain, forlorn woman, and everybody was ready to spend it for her. When I first came to her she had received on an average half a dozen begging letters a day; — a month later she had twice as many by each delivery. Some of them were personal letters, others were official circulars of solicitation for every sort of charitable enterprise; some of them long established, others inchoate; accompanied by pamphlets giving all the minutes, lists of subscribers, newspaper clippings, certificates; besides a special form of appeal setting forth some crucial instance of pressing need for instant donation. There began to be signs of a deluge, of an inundation.

One evening when I was sitting in the library studying up some point in Chinese mythology I looked up and saw that Miss Keogh had entered the room and was standing motionless, looking at me from the other side of the table. There was something of nervousness, almost of excitement in her whole appearance. "What is it?" I exclaimed. "What has happened?"

"I seem to be at the end of my strength," she said. "I do not know what to do."

She stood there, her little hands showing white against the black dress as she clasped and unclasped them. I knew that she had something more to say, and I waited. At last it came. She leaned across the table until her face almost reached mine, then she said, in a tragic whisper, —

"It seems to me that the world has simply gone mad in its desire to get money."

No doubt the nature of some of the requests set forth by her correspondents had been extraordinary. The different ways in which the Keogh money might be distributed showed often a refinement and subtlety hardly to be attained without some practical knowledge of what money could buy. The men and women who addressed her wanted everything. Not a few felt that she needed a companion, guide, and familiar friend who could launch her into the "smart set," initiate her into the refinements of the best society,

who could travel with her, read to her, amuse her. Others wished to induce her to stave off a financial crisis by a handsome and instant loan; certain men told her that they had been intimates of her brother's, and confided in her instinctive and grateful impulse to set them up in business; others disinterestedly offered well paying investments in all sorts of enterprises from planting groves of rubber-trees to the development of a new motor principle. Some offered her children for adoption. Women implored her to give them money to pay debts at bridge and at the department stores, of which they dared not tell their husbands; several wanted money for a trip to Europe or to California; others an Æolian attachment to a piano; one even asked for a diamond tiara.

With indignant gasps and not a few bitter tears Miss Keogh told me what she had hitherto done. Whenever she had seemed to recognize the note of real poverty and unworldliness she had been glad to send a substantial check, feeling as if here at last might be a clue through the tangle. In almost every case this sympathy which had warmed her on the one side was frozen on the other, when following close upon her benefaction came letters from friends and neighbors of the woman she had tried to help, declaring that their own deserts and needs were far greater than the needs and deserts of the beneficiary.

In pain, in perplexity, in disgust, Miss Keogh wished to give up the burden of having to read these begging letters, and I promptly accepted it. Her broad sympathy for her fellow-creatures was not chilled. She was still resolute in denying herself the luxuries so eagerly demanded of her, but she had had a long training in modest means; was ready to apply the Scotch Presbyterian test which went straight to the vital principle of things. When she should find human beings who needed to be clothed, and fed, and sustained, she would be ready and eager to help them. As for those people whose irrational schemes and whose silly guilty squanderings had reduced them to these sordid straits, she felt not one throb of sympathetic response. She did not want their disgraceful secrets, she hated to know about them or to be forced to think about them. Accordingly it was decided that I, on an impersonal basis, simply acting in the interests of my employer, could best meet these appeals, answering them according to certain rules which she laid down. Once I drew her attention to the suggestions of certain women who said they had as good a visiting list as any in New York, and offered, for a consideration, to run her house, to contrive her entertainments, and make her acquainted with the first people.

"Some of these women might help you very much," I said.

She came up to me trembling, almost in tears.

"You are not going to give me up?" she faltered.

"No, no, certainly not, unless you wish it."

She made it so clear that she depended on me that I was touched, in my turn. I never pretended to intense sentiment; to love all the world would be too much for me, but I easily grow very fond of the people with whom I am thrown, and more and more Miss Keogh appealed to me.

I soon came not to dislike the task of looking over the letters, and my instinct for the real need behind some of them presently amounted to divination. More and more I pressed Mr. Bevis and Mr. Bickerdyke into Miss Keogh's service. At my suggestion she made the latter her attorney, and although Swallowfield was not very near New York, it soon became his habit to spend two days of each week in the city, while Mr. Bevis, living, as he did, at High Elms, could easily run up and down without inconvenience. I had detected in Miss Keogh a shrinking, almost a recoil before any sort of responsibility. She was the most feminine of women, and a cry for protection, a sense of something like despair in having to face life alone, often made itself felt in her mien and in her look. One day we kept Mr. Bickerdyke and Mr. Bevis to dinner. It was probably the first act of profuse hospitality of which Miss Keogh had ever been guilty. It dismayed

her not a little to sit down with one man at her right and the other at her left. Somebody had sent some exquisite pink roses, and they were in the centre of the table, set off by the light from four shaded candles. Miss Keogh never wore anything but a plain high black dress, but it was my way to put on a white frock for the evening, open at the throat and with my arms bare from the elbow. The first time I came down dressed in this way I was sure that Miss Keogh was querying with herself whether it could be right, whether it was not a little sinful. But she had become used to it. To-night with her two visitors, although they were of course in morning dress, I could see that she felt as if she were giving a worldly feast. It was not perhaps so much the things we had to eat as the worldly way in which we ate them, which impressed her and rather disturbed her serenity. She sat there with her air of calm timidity, saying little, but no doubt thinking in her heart that it was prodigal luxury. However, Mr. Bevis and Mr. Bickerdyke enjoyed their dinner, and talked a great deal, and she gradually became interested; indeed a sparkle finally came into her eye and even a little spot of color burned on each cheek.

For all these matters they were discussing so vitally concerned her that she was alive to every suggestion. She was recovering from her first impulse of the necessity of cruel haste, realizing

that nowadays it was no easy matter to strike into the very heart of the problem. Indeed, she felt herself at times to be wandering in a dark labyrinth and not knowing how to extricate herself.

Miss Keogh was evidently much impressed by the extent and variety of Mr. Bevis's knowledge of what had been going on in the world since the beginning of time. His whimsical way of looking at facts sometimes puzzled her, and she would follow his talk with an intent, rather puzzled look. She listened devoutly also to Mr. Bickerdyke, who preached sermons and laid down the law. Mr. Bickerdyke had one mind; Mr. Bevis had twenty, and, whether he were right or wrong, depended on the whim of the moment. Mr. Bickerdyke's idea came to this: that the experienced verdict of society, after going on for about six thousand years, was that organized charity offered the best method of reaching the masses. These organizations exist, — hospitals of all sorts, civic clubs, settlements, guilds, seaside and country vacation homes. They are the best machinery so far devised to answer the great crying problem of poverty and misery in cities.

Mr. Bevis argued that millionaires had always gone on doing the same stupid thing over and over. Now, if Miss Keogh would spend her money trying to save Niagara Falls from greedy, sordid human beings, she would not have lived without some touch of greatness.

"You have a great opportunity," he said to her. "I do hate to have Bickerdyke urge you to go on spending your money in the old commonplace way."

Mr. Bickerdyke returned to his own invincible argument.

"The world was not made yesterday. It has gone on for some thousands of years and a great many costly experiments have been tried, and institutions of charity, as they exist to-day, reap the benefit of the experience gained."

Mr. Bevis hated hospitals: he objected to the perpetuation of sick people, of hopelessly incurable people, and considered it no charity to shut them up in institutions where they bored and depressed each other. What Mr. Bevis believed in was in setting everybody who was ill, or bad, or unhappy in a garden: in giving them work to do there, then letting nature perform a possible miracle. The Almighty had set the example. He had established his first creatures in the garden of Eden.

"People are unhappy, and bad, and sick because they have not found out the real means of being good and well and happy," he said.

Miss Keogh was struck by these hints thrown by Mr. Bevis. He had a great many views. "Now about libraries, and schools, and colleges. Too many people are educated already, or half educated, that is; for modern education is like the

old-fashioned American hotel dinner where you had a lot of little bath-tubs set round your plate, which seemed to offer all sorts of edibles in profusion, while the fact was that nothing was fairly well cooked or fairly good. What is spoiling the world is that too many people know the alphabet and the multiplication table. The moment they understand that a b spells ab, and that twice two are four, they consider that the logical sequence is that they ought to have their full share of everything that is going. No, education is made too easy nowadays. There are too many silly libraries. The reason that people of my generation, and of my generation alone, are good for anything, is that we were brought up on a few good books which we had to read over and over until we knew them by heart."

Miss Keogh had her own ideas concerning the crookedness and injustice of a great many human institutions, and when Mr. Bevis set going any sort of theory, she often listened with an air of intense seriousness, and often of downright conviction, which was a clear inspiration to him. Each of us aired our private and particular hobby. Mine was to protect the animals and birds so tragically helpless before ruthless human beings. How poor the world would be without what we call dumb beasts, how pitifully without examples, ideals, and noble instances! Think what a hideous thing life would become

with only men and women, and everything going by motor or steam! I asked her to remember the sense of misery never lifted, of the wrongs unredressed, of the griefs beyond remedy, that all these beautiful creatures have to go on enduring.

There would be room for them, Mr. Bevis argued, in the gardens. He urged upon Miss Keogh that one of the gardens might be devoted to animals, other gardens could be given to birds. He advised, indeed, great tropical gardens under glass; besides Japanese gardens, water gardens, old-fashioned perennial flower gardens. The Japanese gardens might be set round with some of Miss Keogh's images of Buddha.

It was rather a pity that Mr. Bevis permitted his fancy to make this little excursion, for Miss Keogh, who was following his words rather closely, was easily shocked by such an anti-climax. So I made haste to suggest that if one wished to do real good, one might well snatch up a child out of the misery of the alleys, carry it off into the country, and bring it up in country sunshine and fresh air.

"Take it away from its father and mother?" asked Mr. Bickerdyke.

"I had not thought of that."

"Possibly the child was sent them as a compensation for the sorrows of their lives. It must have been given by God for a certain purpose."

"Now, Bickerdyke," said Mr. Bevis, "do you really mean that you believe that all the swarming children in the world are sent by God?"

"Did you suppose the devil had charge of the universe?"

"No, nature."

"I look through nature up to nature's God."

"I believe the Almighty set nature going in the right way. But nature so overdoes the thing, — why she thinks nothing of ordering a million mosquito eggs to a teaspoonful of water."

But Mr. Bickerdyke was radically pious. God moved in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.

Mr. Bevis went back to the original question, — what to do with the money which must somehow be spent.

"I never did believe in setting out to make sacrifices," said Mr. Bevis. "Sacrifices generally do harm. Poverty is considered to be a very great evil, but the fact remains that poverty is a fruitful thing, and that riches are barren. Everything worth doing that has been done in the world since the beginning of time has been done by poor people. The poor envy the rich, and that is the impulse which sets society going. The rich do not envy the poor except for their health, their appetite, their energy, and their ability. The poor can get along perfectly well

without the rich, but the rich cannot possibly get along without the poor. A world of rich people alone could not keep itself running for a week."

Miss Keogh again looked at Mr. Bevis with kindling eyes. Her soul walked in such a straight, narrow road, that these bewildering expeditions into fairyland rather fascinated her. She did believe in the worth of poverty; she distrusted wealth and luxury. But then, alas, she had all this money to dispose of for the good of the world!

"Mr. Bevis will find," Mr. Bickerdyke now remarked, "that although the poor may be called blessed in certain respects, poverty is nevertheless not a fancy nor an hypothesis, but a tolerably grim fact."

Mr. Bevis admitted it with a groan. Let one try to play with the thought, to run away from it, there it was. The fact of suffering humanity has to be accepted, but still suffering may be assuaged, mitigated, if not wholly cured. Almost everything has been done for the poor except to provide them with the true panacea of life, which is music. Think what an inspiration music is, also what a sedative, what an influence it may have in softening the asperities, in lightening the depressing anxieties of life! There is no simpler, sweeter, more direct message than that which music addresses to every individual being.

And as every one knows, the poor love music. Any one can see that even the grinding of the worst hand-organ seems to lift the dull sordid melancholy streets into a different mental atmosphere.

"If I had money to spend in charity," Mr. Bevis continued with enthusiasm, "I would provide every one of the silent, empty churches along the city streets with an organist who would play all the time, and a great choir that would sing twice a day at least. Also a band of brass instruments, and one also of strings to give street concerts."

"It would mean a good deal of idleness, would n't it?" suggested Mr. Bickerdyke. "It does not coincide with the gospel of work which you were preaching a little while ago."

Nevertheless, in spite of their offering certain inconsistencies, I could see that a good many of Mr. Bevis's ideas remained with Miss Keogh. She confessed to me that he was, in some ways, more helpful than Mr. Bickerdyke, whose continual instruction was, —

"Do all you can, and leave the rest to God."

CHAPTER V

OLD FRIENDS AND NEW

It goes without saying that, absorbed as I was in the work laid out for me, I could not concern myself with the tides of the great world outside, and had made no effort to take them at their flood. I was willing enough to be a negligible quantity until I had accomplished my task. I did not receive callers: I had settled that point with Andrew. In the mornings I was busy with Miss Keogh's letters until ten o'clock, three times a week dictating their answers to a girl stenographer, who came in, took my notes, and copied them on a typewriter. From ten until three I worked at the catalogue. Later I walked up Riverside Drive, and very often across to the library. If, when I returned, long past the early gathering dusk, Andrew informed me that cards had been left for me, I took the salver, and without looking at one of the names, emptied the bits of pasteboard into one of the great bronze bowls. Flowers came once or twice a week, and with these Andrew adorned the dinner-table. With the identity of the sender I did not attempt to concern myself. Very often in these early

months at Miss Keogh's, when I went to my room at night, and saw myself in the glass, I felt unfamiliar with my own face. "If this be I, as I do hope it be," I would say to myself, "some day we shall get acquainted again." At present I had to do with another set of ideas altogether. Miss Keogh's demands still loomed up before me hugely.

I ought perhaps to have told before now how much Gaynor Lee had helped me about the mechanical work of the catalogue. He had come to see me not long after Lucy's wedding; had walked through the rooms asking questions about the collection; with the eye of a hawk fastening on objects I had not so far discovered or understood; putting queries to me each of which helped to settle certain series of facts in my own mind. Then, when he had acquainted himself with the task I had to perform, going away promptly, and in a few days sending me half a dozen elaborate *catalogues raisonnés* made out by experts of other collections of curios both here and abroad.

Until Gay had come my progress had been like that of a man across a marsh, when with one foot on a quaking bog he prepares to leap to another without any feeling of being sure of finding it firm beneath him. Practically it was just the push Gay had given me which, so to speak, gave me a feeling of a surer footing, and

which enabled me to give time and thought to Miss Keogh's charitable undertakings. Still, although I was enabled to stop and breathe I was afraid of interruptions, feeling that they would cost me all the ground I had gained already.

However, one evening, towards the middle of January, when I entered the house at half-past six, Miss Keogh came to the top of the stairs to tell me that my aunt, Mrs. Stuart, had only just gone away after waiting for me almost two hours. Finding that I was out she had asked for Miss Keogh, had introduced herself as my nearest relative, also my hitherto guardian, had sat down and talked about me, had asked questions, had been carried away with admiration of the furniture, and by the splendor of the collection, had been very polite to Miss Keogh, but had set the fact clearly before her that I was working too hard; that I was young; that whether my stern resolution might be to set at my duty like a Trojan, still I was not a Trojan, so she begged, entreated, and insisted, that I should be permitted to come and dine with them on the seventeenth, and meet my friends, and account for myself generally. Miss Keogh's conscience had evidently been stung by the suggestion that I was overworked.

"I promised Mrs. Stuart that you should go," she said with her little air of performing a pain-

ful duty imperturbably. "She offered to send her own carriage for you, but I told her a carriage should be provided, and that Andrew should be sent with you and for you. I quite insist, Marcia, on your going," she went on as if she saw signs of disinclination in me. "I understand your faithfulness, but I see now that I have let you undertake too much. I do not wish to take all your time. You are young, — you have your own life to lead."

"But I am leading it. This is my life, not running after Aunt Mary and Lilly."

However, the hour had struck. I had to confess to a certain expansion of consciousness in entering Aunt Mary's house at a quarter before eight two evenings later. There was something keen and sweet in my first impression of the lights, of the warmth and fragrance, of the masses of flowers on every hand. At Aunt Mary's one did not go upstairs to leave one's wraps, but, descending half a dozen steps, found a cloak-room, and going up the same number of steps on the other hand entered the long drawing-room, which at its remote end opened into a smaller one. After being for three months in a house crowded with furniture and art objects, which, no matter how beautiful, were so huge and often bizarre as to be oppressive, there was something particularly civilized in these rooms of Aunt Mary's, where everything alike, sofas, chairs, tables,

pictures, and bric-a-brac, seemed exactly to correspond to the social requirements of living men and women. Here was no suggestion of knotty problems, no need of studying out mythologies, no question of date or period. I knew Aunt Mary's and Lilly's way; they were certain to be late; I did not look for an immediate welcome, but found a certain charm in the experience of walking through the long, empty room and sitting down by the fire which burned on the hearth in the little nook beyond. I was too young not to be conscious of some exhilaration in the unwonted gayety, even in the feeling that I liked the long, slender lines on which my white brocade evening gown was made, and which I had seen to advantage in the many mirrors. Along with this exhilaration was a feeling of being lulled, of experiencing a pleasant half stupor of perception. I was content to look on and enjoy, I did not wish to think or to utter a syllable. In my life with Miss Keogh other senses than those of enjoyment had been quickened: a feeling of daily trouble ringing at the doorbell insistently and calling for a response; of evils to conquer; suffering and grief beyond remedy that must be softened if not allayed. Miss Keogh's perception of life, of something not to be enjoyed but atoned for, had had its effect upon me. What I said to myself as I sat and waited was that I did not belong to these people. My life separated

me from them. All this was a pretty dream, but to me it was only a dream. It had no reality at all, nothing to do with my actual existence.

Then in another moment something in me stirred in its sleep, woke up with a thrill of enjoyment, of keen interest, of eager curiosity. Again I was young and life was full of zest.

A man ran up the steps and walked along the drawing-room. At first he seemed to be walking straight towards me, and as he walked he was smiling. It was Paul Chauncey. My heart beat. At the sight of Paul the thought of that September day came back with a curious feeling of freshness. I was not so lonely in the world as I thought. Here was somebody who belonged to me, who was of my own blood, who at our first glance and word had understood me. How pleasant to meet him! We had a thousand things to talk over. However, my heart had time to get over its beating. He had not seen me. Midway in the room, still with the same eager, smiling look, he drew up and waited. Not for long. Following close upon his steps were three people, an elderly man and woman and a girl. She, with a raised beckoning finger, ran towards a sofa and sat down; he followed, and they instantly began to talk with an air of the closest intimacy.

This surreptitious glimpse of Paul Chauncey and Jean Darcy (for, as it happened, this girl was Jean Darcy, and I had known her from child-

hood) for a moment loomed large in my impressions. Then the whole scene changed. The room was filling up. Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary were receiving their guests: Lilly had found me, I was swept into the centre of things, and everybody was talking to me at once: except Paul Chauncey. He, Paul, did not advance with the others, but stood at a little distance looking at me. In evening dress he was notably handsome and distinguished. I saw so much, although I did not look at him; and I knew that he was looking at me and waiting for his turn to come.

What every one was saying was, "Here you are at last!" Besides Uncle Tom, Aunt Mary, Isabel and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Darcy and Jean, there were Mr. and Mrs. Warren Chester, also my old friend Jem Nicoll and four or five others. Mrs. Warren Chester told me that she was Grace Chauncey, Paul's sister. She said she had been coming to see me week after week ever since November. Why had I refused to see her?

"I have been so busy," was all that I could say.

"I have to confess you do not look so very much overworked," was Uncle Tom's comment, while Aunt Mary put in, —

"She is so proud of her rôle of beggar-maid. Marcia is so much prouder than any of the rest of us."

"Proud that I have joined the great, simple-

minded unabashed multitude of those who toil for wages," I granted.

I instantly liked the Chesters and felt at home with them. Mr. Chester was a cool, imperturbable, good-looking man, the whole effect of him being sane, alert, honest. Grace resembled Paul, and like him had a poise which gave an effect not only of distinction, but of individuality. Grace was full of caressing flatteries.

"From the moment Paul told me about you I have so longed to meet you. I already love you and want to know you. I have had so few cousins."

"Mr. Chauncey is to take you out to dinner, Marcia," Aunt Mary said, interrupting us, and then I knew why Paul had waited.

"So you are not a myth, but a reality," was what he said to me. "Now that I see you after dreaming about you all these months, talking about you, trying to reach you, I can hardly satisfy myself that this is reality. I almost feel now as if I must touch you! Yet I am so afraid I shall wake up." Then, after a little pause, "Why have you never let me in?"

"I am always too busy."

"Busy or not busy, hereafter I shall not ring at that door in vain. I shall go in." As our eyes met we both smiled, laughed indeed. "We are cousins, we are going to be friends," he said as he had said in September. "Is it not so?"

"One takes one's cousins as one finds them, and one is happy to get them. Friends have to be proved."

"I like that," said Paul. "Here I have been leaving whole stacks of cards for you, wasting my income ordering roses from florists, and still you talk of putting my friendliness to the proof."

If my mind were still suffused with the effect of the picture of Paul and Jean Darcy running to each other with frank ardor, it need not alter the fact that he and I were cousins and were going to be friends. Jean sat across the table from me, and looking at her I saw that she had been blossoming into beauty in this year or more that I had scarcely seen her. In figure she suggested a nymph, a nymph who floated rather than walked; she was so light and airy and her draperies seeming always to have a life of their own. Whether her hair waved naturally or by art, it had the loveliest wave and curl and could be knotted anywhere, on top of her head or low on her neck, with an effect which was consummate. To-night she was in fleecy transparent white with a string of curious gold coins round her throat and one at each wrist. There was a classic sort of perfection about Jean. When we had first long ago met at High Elms she had been apparently the child of ill luck, but her life had turned out like a fairy tale. The Darcys had rescued her from poverty and mischance,

and, being rich childless people, had sent her to school and college. So, when Jean and I met for the second time it was at boarding-school; the fairy godmother had waved her wand and the changeling had been turned into the little princess she really was. For the moment Jean had had an opportunity she had risen to it at a bound. She was amazingly clever, had a variety of talents, and could always contrive to cap the climax of other people's performances. She carried off all the prizes at school, and had she taken the full college course would have done everything that could be done. But the Darcys wanted her at home, and Jean had been eager for the real life of men and women. First or last, I had thought a great deal about Jean Darcy. She always seemed to do easily, to attain easily what I had to work for by slow degrees. She had wings to fly with to her object while I hobbled painfully on my feet. But still she paid the penalty. It was always my belief that it is by hard work, and long hard work alone, that man saves his soul alive, and although I had at times longed for Jean's facility, at other times I was ready to say,

> "What I aspired to be
> And was not, comforts me."

Jean Darcy had indeed taught me all I knew about myself, for she was the only person with whom I had ever come into competition, that is,

who had beaten me. And it is good for us to measure ourselves against others and to acknowledge ourselves beaten, and to realize that nothing good comes too easily in this world, and to keep one's self from empty wishing.

Jean was talking to-night with peculiar animation. Jack Bell, a young society man whom every one seemed to know intimately, had taken her out to table, and the conversation had begun between the two, but soon grew so lively that it drew the attention of every one at table, Paul included. Indeed, he soon took a leading part in it. At first the discussion was general, then gradually the dialogue between Jean and Paul proved to be so piquant the others stopped talking in order to enjoy it.

The subject was a play now running at one of the principal theatres, and which every one but myself had seen. The play held the stage partly because everything about it was debatable and gave every one something to talk about: the characters; the actors who took the characters; the truth of the reproduction; the ethics of the plot and its logic. I experienced an agreeable glow in listening to the talk. It concerned matters which lay so entirely outside my world I could have no desire to utter a syllable.

It interested, indeed, it kindled me. It was not only what Paul and Jean actually said, but that I gained a comprehensive idea of what lay

behind their keen criticism: i. e. their sense of the reality of the stage; not only their ardent love of the theatre, but their habit of weighing and measuring plays by a high critical standard, not only of taste, but of almost expert knowledge.

Neither flinched. They sometimes agreed, sometimes clashed, but each struck a spark from the other's flinty spear, and it was amusing to listen. As Paul talked, the fire of his blue eyes and the strength of that resistless straight glance made him seem a formidable adversary, but Jean met him with plenty of wit. Paul said of the leading actress in the play, "Why can't she be natural? I say to a woman, whether she acts, writes, or talks, 'Be natural, be natural; outrage taste if you like, but be natural, and you are pretty sure of being a success.'"

Whereupon Jean replied, "Oh, she is not of that school. Somebody evidently once said to her, 'Aut Bernhardt, aut nihil.'"

And Paul's reply was, "Evidently, then, when I have seen her she was nihil."

Then the ladies rose from table, and Jean slipped her hand under my arm.

"How splendid to see you again, Marcia! And I know you enjoy being here, for your eyes and lips and cheeks are burning! So you know Paul Chauncey? I shall ask him why he never spoke of you. But I suppose there is always too much else to talk about. We are both crazy

about private theatricals, and we are both wild about plays and acting. I still long to go on the stage, Marcia, only papa and mamma will not hear of it."

I remembered very well her ardor for the stage. I knew, too, that she acted well, and I now said so.

"I sometimes feel as if I were always acting," Jean replied. "I do not mean at this moment, for I am honestly delighted to see you, Marcia. But I get so tired of the one monotonous part of a young lady. When I go to the theatre I often feel as if I could play the part so much better than the actors that I long to jump on the stage and show them all how to do it."

"From anybody else that might sound a trifle vain," I returned at this, "but Mrs. Bellair always said that you had a hundred different talents and one touch of genius, and that was for acting."

Aunt Mary and Grace Chester came and asked me to sit down between them and drink my coffee, so Jean abruptly left me, went to the piano and began to sing, in a voice so low that it seemed as if she sang for her own amusement, not for others to hear. Her voice was well-trained and wonderfully sweet.

Aunt Mary was telling Mrs. Chester about Miss Keogh, the house, and the collection, and of how rich everybody said she must be.

"She only wishes to be rid of the money," I said.

"That is no difficult matter."

"Oh, but it is a difficult matter for her. She wishes to do good with the money. What she fears is that her money may do a great deal of harm. She reads the papers and finds in the accounts of scandals, crimes, and accidents the same moral, that light heads are turned and weak characters spoiled by money."

We sat and talked about the curious spectacle of a whole world groaning and travailing in its desire to get money, to make money, to steal money, and yet here was this little woman impatient to get rid of hers and finding no outlet where she could be sure it might not do more harm than good.

"She had better turn to and spend it on herself."

"Even now I fancy she wakes up in the middle of the night suffering from the thunder of her conscience, which tells her in no uncertain voice that she and I are living in too much luxury."

"All the same, I liked her," said Aunt Mary. "She seems simple and real, there is no pose in her."

"She could not pose to save her life. I have to do the posing for her."

"Imagine you posing!"

Aunt Mary was intensely curious about the sort of duties I had to perform. "Looking up

objects of charity? Finding people to whom one can do good? It is all done for you!"

Aunt Mary was crushingly contemptuous of Miss Keogh's setting herself up to decide that charitable organizations are inadequate. She herself was on a dozen different committees.

"But Miss Keogh does not set herself up," I insisted.

The Darcys had to go on somewhere, and while they were making their adieux, Grace Chester caught my hand and kissed me.

"I am so glad we are cousins," she said, "for I love you already. Indeed, I was ready to love you, for Paul has talked so much of you."

I was glad to look at this new cousin, and to give myself up to her. She was magnificently dressed, but with a certain simplicity and sincerity which seemed her attribute. Had there been any sign of a love of display, her diamond necklace and tiara would have seemed too ostentatious for the little dinner-party. As it was, these splendors were a part of her, like her beautiful eyes and her sweet smile. She sat close beside me, and talking rapidly in her soft clear voice, in a quarter of an hour had told me all the chief facts of her life.

"Paul described everything about the birthday," she said. "You must let me go and see you at your place in Swallowfield some day. Even if my great-grandfather were the cause of

your great-grandfather's misfortunes you will have to forgive it. We never profited by it I can assure you. I am so thankful that you at any rate have something left to be faithful to. We had nothing to hold on to, only wings, and we used them. No luck has come to the Chaunceys for many a day. Until mamma made her second marriage we were always running after some cheaper place to live in. Paul and I grew up detached from our country, detached from domestic life. We liked it, — the being detached. It was a fad with us to dine each night in a different café. What mamma pined always to do was something she had never done before. Paul and I took to it easily, and there is a touch of the bohemian in both of us. Then think, with just that bringing up, mamma married me off at nineteen to a man who likes to do everything to-day exactly as it was done yesterday, and to do the same to-morrow as it is done to-day. He had the idea that a girl of nineteen was wax in his hands, to run into an acceptable mould as a model wife. I was wax, that is I ran into the mould and have kept in it, but always with a sense of being cramped and crushed. My fate is to live three quarters submerged, and the three quarters never come to the surface. It is only a fraction of me that the world gets hold of."

I looked at her trying to decide whether she

was in earnest or was joking. She laughed, and went on.

"Is n't it in one of John Oliver Hobbes's novels that somebody asks of a young wife, 'Does your husband know you as the devil knows you?' I might expect Paul to understand me, for he himself has the same trick of the blood. Warren Chester could not understand me to save his life. You will like my husband, Marcia. I saw in a moment that he liked you. You must come to us a great deal, and you will find out that he is worth liking. He is the most imperturbable of men, despises effusion, fuss. Sometimes I ask him if he still loves me; his reply is: 'Well, I said so once, and I have seen no particular reason for changing my mind.' He is full of affairs. Everybody in New York wants him, he is so quiet and strong. He goes away before eight in the morning, and does not get home until almost seven o'clock, then he dresses carefully, and expects to come down to a good dinner and to see me opposite looking my best. I never wear fewer jewels than I do to-night; he is fond of jewels. He expects, too, that I shall have all sorts of amusing little things to tell him, about the children, myself, my day's occupations, the gossip of the town. Twice a week he is willing to dine out, and once a fortnight, from December to April, we give a dinner-party. He loves the opera, and we always go. As for my

having any other interests or ambitions, he simply could not understand it. He has not the faintest conception of the possible restlessness of a woman who feels that her little day is passing, and longs to get something satisfying out of it."

I laughed with frank surprise. "It seems to me that with a good husband, four children, and social supremacy, you do get a good deal out of your life. It is certainly hard for you to have to go forth and look for a grievance."

"But I want him to think more about me, I want him to realize that I am not merely his wife, the mother of his children, but a live creature with individual wishes, feelings, pains. I long sometimes to rouse him, to give him a shock. I said to him only last night, 'Suppose I were to go to you and confess that I had debts weighing upon me, that I had played bridge for money and lost more than I could pay.' His answer was, 'My wife play bridge for money? Mrs. Warren Chester knows better what good taste and dignity are than to play bridge for money. I have just an ideal about the sort of a wife I like, and that is the sort of wife I have got.' Can't you see," Grace went on, "that such a sort of threat stirs me up, and makes me long to show him that I am not merely a puppet?"

The men had come into the drawing-room, and Warren Chester approached us, and told his wife that the carriage was waiting. Paul

Chauncey stood looking on while I bade them good-night, then he came up to me, and said, —

"I am going to see you to-morrow night at half-past eight."

"I never see anybody in the evening."

He did not smile, but kept perfectly serious.

"I am going to see you to-morrow night at half-past eight. You will not be gone out?"

"Oh no."

"Nor hardly in bed?"

"Hardly."

"Well, expect me, then."

CHAPTER VI

MY COUSIN PAUL

He came next evening while Miss Keogh and I were sitting together. I introduced him to her as the cousin of whom I had spoken, and after exchanging a few words with him she went into the little room adjoining and sat down at her desk. Paul, who had risen and crossed the floor as she went out, came back, looked at me with a little smile, then sat down opposite me in what we called the Spanish chair, a curious old chair with a deep curve in the richly embossed leather back, and with a headpiece and arms of rich carving. His evening dress became him. The shaded light softened the outlines of his face as he sat with his left elbow on the arm of the chair, and his cheek resting against the palm of his hand. He was at this moment a singularly handsome man, and looked, besides, strong, self-sustained, and perfectly at ease. He began at once to talk about himself, said that he had never been so closely occupied in his life as he had been all winter, having an unwonted pressure of legal business on his hands, being engaged in the settling of two estates (horrible drudgery,

he explained in parenthesis, but it paid and gave him a few dollars for his tailor), and that these affairs had been running in harness with duties he considered equally important, for he had been going to the theatre night after night, not, heaven knows, for pleasure, but because he was writing a play, and, having come to the last act, needed just that sort of tap on the cheek which is given by a powerful thrill of emotion. But so far in vain. The thrill had not come, and at this moment he was cross and dissatisfied, he declared; he wished to finish his play, and it would not get finished.

I told him that the talk at the table the night before about the theatre had been a revelation. I had never supposed that people could discuss a play so seriously, and with so much feeling, as if it touched upon the real facts of life.

"Nothing is so real to me as the drama," said Paul. "A good play is the epitome of life. There is just one thing I desire to do, and that is to write a successful play."

He asked how many times I had ever been to the theatre in my life, and when I told him, he was impressed by the meagreness of my opportunities.

"Now that you are beginning to go out at last," he said, "I shall beg you to go to the theatre with me. Grace will make up a party."

"Not yet. I went to Aunt Mary's, but I shall

not consider myself free to go out very often this winter. I have too much to do."

"Why should you be so busy?" He sat musing on the fact. "I remember your saying that you wished to take life like a man. Now let me tell you that a man soon finds out that he must put a good deal besides work into his life, or body, brain, and nerves know how to take their revenge."

I answered that so far I had only been trying to learn how to do my work.

"But you get on?" His tone and look reached my consciousness. Both were kind and encouraging.

"Yes," I said.

"Still, you must not go on quarreling with your friends, but let us see you occasionally."

"Have I quarreled with my friends?"

"Have we not called and been denied? Sent flowers without receiving the least acknowledgment?"

"Ah, it was you who sent the flowers?"

"I sent some, certainly. I lay no claim to being the only friend and admirer you have. But I do lay claim to being your only cousin. Cousins are called, not chosen; lovers and friends pass, but cousins remain. I am a certain fixed quantity in your life, and you will have to take me into your calculations. I have not been able to get the idea of you out of my head since that day I saw you in Swallowfield."

"When I think of my twenty-first birthday I blush and long to hide myself."

"Why, I beg leave to ask?"

"I was so colossal in my egoism. I was so anxious to convince my guardians of my efficiency that I was wholly carried away. When I remember how I vaunted my own powers!" I broke off. "You may not think it, but actually I am not vain; indeed, I am rather humble."

"No, not vain; I did not call you vain."

He sat leaning back against the leathern cushions, his arms extended on the arms of the chair; his chin was sunk on his breast.

"Let me tell you," he said, "that no man who saw you and heard you that day will ever forget you. I was so glad, so proud that I could claim even a distant cousinship. Now in return I ask you to tell me that you are glad to have me as a cousin."

"Very glad," I said frankly. "The comfort of having cousins is that they understand and are willing to wait."

"I have waited, very impatiently perhaps, but so far I have waited. Now I long to understand."

I was not a difficult person to understand, and I told him so. Yet I said that it was in general only those who had known and loved me in childhood who had really understood and loved me. At school and at college, even if the girls were

attracted, I was too busy; had too many things on my mind; I was too much in earnest about getting on for them to feel quite at home with me. I could not tell them that from the moment my father and mother died I had had a terrible sense of obligation. So much depended on me. Besides, my childhood had been different from that of the others: I suffered always from a haunting sense of things happening, and the cost of things was always in my mind: if we were comfortable I knew that bills would come: that no matter how much money poor papa sent and how much came in from our small investments, the bills were sure to tot up to a bigger figure than our balance to pay them. Still, I always felt sure that we were to be rich again sometime; the money belonged to us, and it must finally come back.

While I said this Paul reached out his large, well-shaped right hand and touched mine; just touched it kindly, that was all.

"All these things were in my mind," I went on. "When I was finally left all alone in the world I could not afford to let myself mourn aloud too much, but I suffered, and I think the effect of my suffering alone was to make everybody think me proud and conceited. Little did they know about my ambitions, my defeats, my disgusts! I was different from the happy ones. I am still different" —

Our eyes met, and I felt that we were cousins, that we were friends.

"I understand you," said Paul. "In a certain way our experiences were identical, for we were poor. But all my life long I have missed just that sort of obedience, that fidelity to something which has been so strong with you. We can only believe as deep as we live. We had no place and no traditions to be true to. Besides, my mother had an idea that cosmopolitanism was rather a fine thing; at any rate, until she married Mr. Ellis shabby cosmopolitanism suited our finances better than staying at home and paying taxes. Mr. Ellis could only live in certain climates, and in fact could not really live anywhere, but patiently went on trying. Upon the whole it is not strange that I am something of a bohemian. But a touch of bohemianism is a good thing, don't you think so?"

We discussed the term: I was not sure exactly what he meant, for bohemianism is a quality of which different people have different perceptions. Paul told an amusing story about a dinner-party which George Sand gave soon after she became acquainted with Alfred de Musset, when she dressed him up in the costume of a Normandy peasant girl to wait on the table. She had invited a Doctor of Philosophy from the Institute, and not finding the right person to meet him asked Pierrot from the Théâtre Comique and intro-

duced him as a distinguished member of the English House of Commons come to Paris to bring dispatches from the government. Accordingly the Doctor of Philosophy prepared to discuss European politics with the Englishman, and put all sorts of questions to him which were only answered by a word or a shake of the head. Not once was this discreet silence broken until finally, when the member of the Institute set about defining the European balance of power Pierrot at last broke forth, "Would you like to know what is my idea of the European balance of power?" and catching up a plate he twirled it in the air until it spun round, then caught it on the point of his knife and held it there revolving.

I laughed. It was all very amusing and clever, and he had told it cleverly.

"Is n't a touch of bohemianism the leaven that saves society and that inspires literature and art?" said Paul. "And American society is at last beginning to feel the leaven rather powerfully. It is the inevitable reaction from the old Puritanism, for Puritanism so overdid the thing. Those old days, when one took one's eternal future in one's hand if one infringed on any of the Ten Commandments, are gone; that spirit has given way to a desire to see what life really is. After considering cards wicked, and gambling an incredible sin, even in men, most of the women I know gamble from morning until night.

After its being a crime to covet one's neighbor's wife or husband, and marriage being accepted as something as final as the day of judgment, at least until death parted the victims, everybody nowadays gets divorced and marries their neighbors' husbands and wives." He paused a moment and laughed. "You need not tell me you hate the trend of society; your face shows it. You want to preach to me a little: but the sermon is not needed. I hate it myself. I go into the best society I can get, and it is amazing how poor it is. If I go at all it is because I find it just so much artistic material, and wish to make it plastic to my hand."

It puzzled me how, when he had a satisfying profession, he could find time or ambition to write. He told me that he had at first some taste for the intricacies and subtleties of the law, but had never been successful in trying cases; he generally hated his clients, their faces, their clothes, their manners, or their morals. In a real villain he might become interested, but he did so despise the greedy rascals who considered themselves honest men. After a few jury cases, he had simply given them up and had gone in for a kind of business more congenial. He hated legal quibbles. He could make five thousand dollars a year in his branch of the profession, and that kept him afloat. But his passion was for literature. What he longed to do was to work

up the caprices, the absurdities, the foibles of humanity; at least his rationale of the fads, the affectations of contemporary life as he saw them, into a successful play. Yet it was not his idea to show merely a touch of malice in his enjoyment of the wickedness of human nature, but he wished to catch the fine flavor of the real passions of men and women, to press a sweeter and higher ideal upon the world.

Still, it was not alone his wish to write a great play — he freely confessed that it was largely the idea of all the money a successful play meant that made him eager to accomplish it. So much a night, so much a week, so much a month, the wealth loomed before him; he counted off the thousands and the tens of thousands on his fingers.

"But I talk like a fool," he said. "The play is not finished, and I know not how to finish it. I cannot make it rise to a true climax. I have got the ideal, but something eludes me. I gave the fragment of the play to a friend to read," he continued. "She herself is a very clever actress. I hoped she might help me out."

"Was it to Jean? To Jean Darcy!" I exclaimed.

"Of course; there is no other such clever girl in society. She tells me that she has known you for years. What do you think of her?"

"That she is miraculously pretty and miracu-

lously clever. She has always done so easily everything that I longed to do. I might have envied her if it had been worth while."

"*You envy her!* Marcia Dundas envy Jean Darcy!" His disdain of the idea that I could entertain such a feeling was apparently crushing. "Not but that she is a pretty butterfly enough. The Darcys may as well let her go on the stage, for she was born for it, and is an actress and nothing but an actress from the top of her head to the tips of her toes. Her mother was an actress; her father was a younger son of a baronet in Surrey who fell in love with her and ran away with her. Jean is impressionable to everything; she has the gift of giving back the reflection, the tone, the echo of all she sees, feels, or hears. I have never seen any one, man or woman, in whom the artistic sense expressed itself so unconsciously. As you say, she is really clever, and she has besides an enormous curiosity about life, a swift instinct and a tireless ingenuity in getting hold of whatever she wants. She plays the oddest tricks: she knows just how to dress, but likes never to give precisely the same effect twice. She seems never to like to do anything over. That is her mistake, for she misses the very result she tries to attain. She has a magnetic quality, and draws people, and has often a perfectly infectious wit. But a good many people who are carried away with her for the time are

annoyed with her afterwards for making them do things they do not wish to do, and do not approve of. She is full of mischief and has that bohemian quality to her finger-tips of longing to pass bounds, to kick over the traces. Every man likes to dance with her, but soon finds out that the lookers-on criticise. However, the gift of high spirits is a great relief in a tedious society like that which the Darcys draw about them, and they are as much dazzled and surprised at Jean's antics as a beetle could be in following the splendid flutterings of a butterfly."

He had been interested in his own analysis and had gone on swiftly, quite forgetting the impression he might be creating in my mind. Now he broke off, laughing.

"You see I have taken the measure of her," he said in a different way, "because I have thought of her as the leading character in my play. She could not invent anything, to save her life, but she is instant in catching another person's idea. The drawback to this sort of facility is that all her feelings are superficial. I fancy that she has not one spark of heart."

Now, I believed that Jean had plenty of heart for some people. I defended her, and I also gave her credit for more cleverness and originality than Paul seemed to do, explaining that at school she had carried off all the prizes, and so at college had surpassed me.

"Then she stole her ideas from you; she can invent nothing." He insisted on this point, then jumped up suddenly, protesting that he had no idea it was so late.

Miss Keogh came in to bid him good-night.

"Come again," she said as she held out her hand. "Marcia needs a little variety in the evenings. I am so glad she has cousins and friends."

CHAPTER VII

IN THE HEART OF THINGS

While Paul talked I had listened to his words and had thought also of the man behind the words. My guardians, my friends, my professors, and my instructors had been something quite different. In my vacations spent with Aunt Mary I had had some dancing partners. Then there had been always Gaynor Lee and Jem Nicoll, old friends and chums with whom I had grown up and who had been a part of my young life.

Paul's physical personality, to begin with, was a more distinctive thing. Long-limbed, muscular, well-knit, in every look and movement he carried a suggestion of force. I liked his face, with his thick brown hair growing off the forehead and temples, his heavy dark eyebrows with deeply set, intensely blue eyes; it seemed to me he had a look of great strength and steadfastness. Whatever he did or said seemed a part of himself; the outcome of a mind with its own vital principle. He spoke with decision, and all he said seemed for the moment convincing. I could not easily have differed with him, at least

I could not have frankly expressed my point of difference.

Thinking about him afterwards, I could understand that his bringing up had had its sure effect upon him, and had left him with a distaste for doing what did not exactly please him, and with as decided a taste for novelty and adventure. He had at once established a friendly footing with Miss Keogh. He was curious about the collection, and, when one day he came to see it, was frankly carried away with admiration for some of the objects, and soon got into the habit, when he had a little time to spare, of dropping in and working with me on the catalogue. It was not for nothing that, in the years while he was forming, he had lived in the different capitals of Europe and had acquired a good deal of expert knowledge. He attributed it to his mother, who, he declared, had been a peculiarly "assimilative" person, and who was never so happy as when rummaging curiosity shops, bazaars, and museums. Paul himself had managed to get hold of very clear notions concerning certain distinctions of pattern, color, and glaze. He professed himself to be not a little struck by the astuteness of the late Nicholas Keogh, who, if his way had been to snap at any sort of a bargain, had not often failed to get hold of a good article. He was ready to admire my system of work, but when I told him that it had been

Gaynor Lee who had really set me going, he exclaimed, "*That* boy I saw at Swallowfield!"

But what he was incredulous about was Miss Keogh's standpoint regarding the collection and all her brother's property; the strange unaccountable necessity under which she labored of getting rid of money which she might use in a thousand ways for herself. All the world for all time has regarded money as a fluid commodity invariably fresh, untainted, in itself uncorrupted and incorruptible, like the tides of the sea with their rise and fall. For her not to seize this influx of wealth at its flood, and thus float up to some high water mark of distinction seemed to him a wicked waste.

He liked to talk to Miss Keogh about her views, and with some easy margin of sympathy won her to express her mind; not freely, for she was always reticent, but in a way which enabled him to gain an idea of her by hints and inferences, and occasional flash-lights into the hidden places of her heart and conscience. The money had come to her by strange happenings. She never told just why it seemed to her something not to be accepted but expiated. What she said was that she had lived so far outside the turmoil of the world that she could not understand the world. What were perhaps temptations to people who were in the midst of the mad competitions of life were not temptations

to her. She had no desire to be rich. She did not believe that anybody ought to be rich: if they had more than was required for daily comfort and security for the future, they were living at the expense of some of their fellow-beings, robbing them indeed of their right to the pleasantness of life, were defrauding their own brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. In the course of a few years, Miss Keogh believed, it would come to pass that rich people would be ashamed to live in more luxury than their neighbors; personal extravagance would count against the individual, like gluttony and drunkenness.

While Paul won Miss Keogh to express these views, which were the very fibre of her existence, there was a sweetness in her voice, and a serenity in her face which made her very attractive. He would look at me half with a faint recognition of the beauty of her unworldliness, and half with a joke at her confiding these ideas to him.

"Not but that I have an unworldly side of my own," he said once. "I like her saying 'I need very little; what I do not actually require I wish to give away.'" He looked at me. "If you had a great fortune what should you do with it?"

"If I were to have a great fortune it would come from some of my Western land turning out to be valuable. I should feel that it belonged to me. I should spend it in keeping up the place in Swallowfield." He looked at me and smiled.

"I dare say if I had money," he said presently, "I should spend it in the brutally successful American way. And yet I hate it. I can feel exactly about the way Nick Keogh made his money as his sister does. Yet I know plenty of men who made their fortunes by no more legitimate trick, and yet when they have their pile to show in solid cash, if the pile is big enough, and glossed over with some sort of conventional piety and social culture, it makes a shining light in the community. I abhor money standards. It sometimes occurs to me at a dinner-party to look around the table at the men with their close-shaven chins, and their immaculate shirt fronts, and the women with their smooth soulless faces above their round white necks hung about with strings of pearls and diamond necklaces, and say to myself that I am sick of the modern American type. They show the result of having too much to eat and drink, of having seen and done everything, of having nothing left to do except to explore their sensations. Often one sees the mere sensualist grinning through the mask."

I had by this time dined with the Warren Chesters and with the Darcys. I had heard not a little about Paul from Lilly and from Jean. Then, too, Grace Chester had talked about her brother to me. She found it a fault in Paul that he had these moods about society, that he neglected important people, ignored invitations

after accepting them, and, if he did go out, was often haughty and reserved in his manner, and showed an almost scornful disregard of the people he was thrown in with.

"Paul talks as if he looked down upon merely rich people," she said; "but the fact remains that he cares for nothing except the most expensive way of doing things, and anything second rate revolts his fastidiousness. He is extravagant by habit, and has no idea of how not to be extravagant. His income is ample for a bachelor, but he is always behindhand. I used to believe that he would marry some very rich girl, but the trouble with Paul is that he wants everything, — to be utterly carried away by a powerful feeling, and yet to make a great alliance with lots of money and social prestige behind it. Paul could not marry a rich woman simply because she was rich. He insists that he must be in love with his wife; that he could not go into marriage without the most imperative feeling."

Then again Grace said, —

"It is partly his sense of having failed to make his mark as a lawyer that makes him turn away from his profession. Now there is Felix Rose, for example, — the income he has is something tremendous. I don't wonder that Paul almost gets in a rage at the idea of that man's success, nor at the desire to make some money himself

which is behind this obsession to write a successful play."

"I suppose that most of the good things that have been done in the world have been done from the desire of making money," I suggested.

Grace looked at me.

"Do you believe that Paul has it in him to write a good acting play?" she asked.

"I have never seen any of his work."

"He is clever in many ways, and full of force and vitality," said Grace. "Then he has always, from the time we used to haunt puppet shows in Naples, had a real passion for the stage. It might not have been so strong if he had not taken such an interest in Jean Darcy."

Grace paused on this suggestion. I waited for her to define herself.

"I don't mean that he is in love with her," she continued; "it is this absurd passion for the theatre that draws them together. It is curious what a fatality there seems to be in Jean's taste for the stage."

She clearly defined Jean's position with the Darcys. They had picked her up a mere waif and stray, and becoming interested in her they determined to adopt her, at first making it clear that certain family claims which they considered imperative would put it out of their power to do more than educate her and fit her for any career she might choose. It was in this way that

it happened Jean had grown up with the fixed idea of entering the theatrical profession. Later, the Darcys, finding her so full of talent and charm, had become warmly attached to her, and had more and more found her necessary to their own happiness. By this time they were willing and ready to make a handsome provision for her if she should marry in a way to suit them, and at their death were ready to give her a third of their property, which was considerable. Paul's acquaintance with Jean had begun on an ocean steamer. She was at that time only sixteen, and when she had told him that she longed and intended to become an actress, her evident talent had interested him, and, ever since, her ambition for the stage and his own absorption in the idea of writing a play for her had drawn them closely together.

"What the result of it all will be I cannot venture to predict," Grace now added. "At one time I felt he could hardly do better than marry her. The Darcys would be very glad to accept him as a son-in-law, and I have sometimes thought that Jean was not a little in love with him. Again I have thought that he did not care for her at all except that he believes she has genius and is interested in its development. He has told me, in fact, that although he liked her as an actress he hated her as a woman, she is such a whirlwind of caprices. But I have al-

ways noticed that sometimes when a man says he hates a woman it is because he is afraid of loving her too much. At any rate, Jean knows how to flatter him; she makes him feel that nobody else so well understands his great possibilities, in fact that they are without limit."

CHAPTER VIII

YOUTH AND ART

"LET me see something you have written," Paul said abruptly to me one evening.

I had at odd times begun many things, but had finished nothing. I told him so.

"Let me see the beginning of something."

So far my attempts at authorship had been only a dissipation, a hidden pleasure. I had been so busy studying, cramming, working up to a certain climax, it had been only in summer vacations that I had had a chance to put pen to paper. Then when the day, the hour, came I had made the most of my impulse; sometimes writing down an exact transcript of what I had seen or felt or heard; again working out a thought into a story. In doing this I had experienced sometimes, besides a sense of joy, a sense of power. But I had always felt that the time had not yet come to give myself free play, that I was trespassing upon time which belonged to my regular work. Nature makes no sudden starts: the mental tendency had been in me always; my life had seemed to be the mere preparation for my writing. When the idea of a story took possession of

me its roots were apt to be in some bit of actual life of which I had heard, or had known myself, but not always; and for characters I chose the men and women I had dreamed of, imaginary beings full of warmth and vitality who in going through the fictitious incidents would have the same feelings that I myself might have experienced. Thus all I had done so far was an intimate part of myself. I should never have thought of showing these half finished stories to anybody; — to anybody, that is, except to Paul, if he wished it. Paul had just that easy, imperious way with me which made me glad to obey. I felt indeed that I should like to have my work tested. I believed that if he said there was nothing in it I should suffer no disappointment or humiliation. In accepting this position it had been my expectation that the six hours given to Miss Keogh would not interfere with my carrying on some of my own work. I was so fully occupied I had found it out of the question. Now, when I went upstairs to my room I was in doubt which particular story to choose; they were all experiments, and I selected the one in which the experiment had been carried farthest.

When I came down with the manuscript in my hand and handed it to him, "I like the blue ribbon," he said, and I felt very certain that he did not expect great things from me.

He was sitting in the Spanish chair, talking to

Miss Keogh, who had returned to the room while I was upstairs "rummaging" in my desk. They were discussing some matter which had come up and which interested her, and I sat down quietly and listened. He continued to hold the little package in his hand, and from time to time as he talked rapped with it on the arm of the chair. He went away after a while, and when I followed him to the top of the stairs he said, "Did any one ever see this?"

"No one. I have never in my life shown one word that I have written to any human creature. Indeed, I have never had time to read it over myself."

"There is always a first audience and always a first man. George Eliot surprised Lewes with her story of 'Amos Barton,' and Elizabeth Barrett Browning put the 'Sonnets from the Portuguese' into Browning's pocket, did n't she?"

I knew that he was laughing at me, but I did not object to his laughing. When I went back to the library I saw that Miss Keogh had heard what was said, and as my way was I told her exactly what it was about.

Paul came again the next evening. "Look here," he said while we were shaking hands, "I want to know where you found that plot."

"The plot? Do you mean the story? Why, it simply came into my head and set me to writing."

"Did you ever hear it? Did you ever read it?"

"No."

"But how did you happen to get hold of it?" His persistence puzzled me.

"Why, one has to have a story — it partly makes the characters and the characters partly make it. Sometimes it comes from something I have heard. But not in this case."

"And you really made it up?"

"Of course I made it up."

"You are sure you just stumbled upon it?"

"Stumbled is the word."

"Do you care a great deal about it?"

"I care nothing at all. It is simply one of a dozen stories that I had begun, and when I was looking for one last night I saw that it was a little less incomplete than the rest."

"I wish you would give it to me."

"With all the pleasure in the world."

"Do you really mean it?"

"Why not? I have a dozen others which I like just as well. It is more than possible that I should never have touched this one again."

All this rapid dialogue had taken place while we stood without moving from the place where I had risen to greet him. His vivid glance was fixed on me. He seemed excited.

"Do sit down," I now said. I resumed my own seat, and he sank into the nearest chair, giving a little sigh as he did so.

"That plot is exactly what I have been waiting

for," he said. "Just that tap on the cheek which wakes one up, makes one feel that after all one has some power. It is curious how you have contrived to pack the whole thing with meaning. Corisande is a wonderful creation. How did you get hold of her? Where did you find that name?"

"In some old play. Or perhaps it was in listening to one of the lectures on English literature while I was at college that the name struck me, and I said to myself, 'I will give the name of Corisande to one of my heroines.'"

"You cannot think how it has all taken hold of me," he said again with that sigh of contentment. "It is wonderful, wonderful that a girl like you could have done it. Reading it I felt like saying, 'But Marcia, how much you know!' Now looking at you I feel like saying, 'But Marcia, how much you have guessed."

I was a little bewildered and inclined to believe that the subtlety he detected was in his own mind. But a curious unwonted feeling of pride and pleasure bubbled up within me. Paul liked it. Paul was pleased with me. I was not used to praise.

He went on telling me just how the play he wanted to write had taken shape before his eyes. Again and again he put the question as to my willingness to give him the whole story without reserve. I did not tell Paul in so many words that I was glad and proud to give it, but it was true. I

had regarded my performance as of so little importance that it reminded me of a story Grace Chester had told me about an emerald she wore in a ring and for which I had expressed great admiration. She and her husband were in Egypt, and the morning they were leaving the hotel in Cairo a fakir met them in the corridor with a tray of baubles which he pressed upon them so pertinaciously that Mr. Chester said, "Just choose something and I will give the fellow ten francs to get rid of him." She accordingly picked out a green stone, almost at random. Not until they reached Paris did she find out that the green stone was an emerald of rare beauty and value. Paul went on talking about this bit of green glass of mine which had, by some miracle become a flawless gem.

Characters and action suited his purpose exactly; he must alter the story and situation just by a hair's breadth to make the feeling keener; and he quoted: —

> "Our interests, on the dangerous edge of things.
> The honest thief, the tender murderer,
> The superstitious atheist, demireps
> That love and save their souls in new French books —
> We watch while these in equilibrium keep
> The giddy line midway; one step aside,
> They're classed and done with."

During the fortnight that followed I saw Paul only once, and that was at the Warren Chesters',

who had asked me to dine with them early and go to the opera. Paul came in when we were almost through dinner, declaring that it had altogether escaped his mind that he was invited for the hour of seven instead of eight, sat down, and went through the remainder of the meal with the air of a somnambulist. The conversation dragged like a dull game. Grace, always fitful, was apt to be disinclined to talk freely while her husband listened critically. Mr. Chester's opinions, always positive, without concession or compromise, did not lend themselves to the light phases of dinner talk. When he had uttered his say upon a subject it seemed to be finished, one did not feel inclined to waste effort on further speculations. Although sometimes when I begin to talk I am not easily stopped, I can sit silent against any soul alive. To-night, having nothing in particular to say, I did not even begin to talk.

"Is anything the matter with you, Paul?" I heard Grace ask.

"I have been busy; I am busy," was the reply.

"An important case?"

"No, a play."

"The same —?"

"No, a new one."

This half aside had come to my ears, and Paul, sitting opposite, now flung me a glance, half fun, half fire. It was not till we had taken our seats in the box at the opera that he really

addressed me. Then, leaning down, he said, close to my ear, "In all my life nothing has ever taken hold of me so completely as this."

"You mean" —

"I mean your characters, your plot, the whole thing. It is life itself."

Then "Die Walküre" began. There are certain times in our lives when great art speaks to our souls in no uncertain accents. I have never heard a strain of "Die Walküre" since without a stirring of the blood. Certain motives in the music had the effect upon me of a mysterious call, a cry of instinct: I did not try to separate the color, the vividness, the swiftness of the movement from my own uplifting of spirit. The essential pulse of the flame that flowed all through me had its kindling, no doubt, in the feeling that Paul had praised my work. And then I had so much to do in my life: it was surely something to have begun.

The story which Paul had defined as "life itself" suddenly reasserted itself, set itself going in my head as if it were part of the throbbing and vibrating music. I had left it unfinished; I now saw it whole. The characters who were suffering, struggling, loving, finding it hard to live, had no longer to ask why I had left them on the brink. The logic of their history worked itself out, the meaning of their lives was clear to me, and their fate answered the call as with a rush of wings.

While my senses and imagination were thus busy I had all the while supposed that Paul was still just behind me. Very possibly the idea of his near presence keyed me to a more eager susceptibility and concentrated my thoughts on the story in which he was so much absorbed. I felt as if our minds were kindled by the same torch, and it would have been easy and natural for me to have turned to him when the curtain went down at the close of the act, exclaiming triumphantly, under cover of the applause with which the house was ringing: "I wonder if you have worked out the climax of the plot to your satisfaction, for I have."

But just as I looked away from the stage, where Brünnhilda and Siegmund were bowing over the footlights, my glance, inevitably making the circuit of the balcony, was caught by the flutter of a hand holding a spangled fan. It was Jean Darcy's gesture that arrested me. Paul was sitting behind her, and, leaning forward, was talking to her with animation, and while she listened to him she was nodding and smiling at me.

I must have sat with my whole attention fastened upon the two, for Grace Chester put her hand on my arm, and the same moment some one said to me, "Are we not to be looked at or spoken to, Miss Dundas?"

Mr. John Bell, or Jack Bell, as his friends

called him, and Mr. Felix Rose had come into the box. I had met them both at the Darcys' and also at the Chesters'. Warren Chester had given them his place. Jack Bell was handsome, ready, fluent, one of the men who, the moment they address a woman, seem to find their all with her and to care for nothing else. Mr. Rose was quiet, acute, penetrating. He had the reputation of being one of the most brilliant young lawyers in New York. He was, besides, of Jewish descent, had a great love for music and for art, with an instinctive connoisseurship for both. It was always easy to talk to either of these men, and in my present thrilled mood I had a thousand things to say. One is not young for nothing; one is not a woman for nothing. I was full of appreciation, of divination, and what I felt came as easily to my lips as the flow of blood through my veins. The interlude was over presently, and as the curtain went up for the fourth act Grace gave me a little nod and smiled.

The sweet deception that Paul had all the time been sitting behind me, and that to him, as to me, the music was reading magnificent meanings into my little story had quite vanished. For an instant, instead of warmth and expansion, I had suffered from a sensation of chill, almost of menace. For one moment it had been almost a mortifying discomfiture that Paul had deserted me; had deserted me for Jean Darcy. Now I

was ready to smile at the idea of my having either right or inclination to monopolize Paul. Except in the most accidental and casual way I did not belong to this world in which he and Jean met and talked together, naturally and inevitably, day after day, and night after night. The music which made such a powerful appeal to me, stirring both soul and sense, was to most of these people no particular experience, simply offering something to discuss as a good or indifferent artistic production. It was to them a part of the set accompaniment of their lives which helped on the comedy and the melodrama. The infectious passion and sentiment which had so taken hold of me would have been to them inexplicable. But I need not rebel, for what I asked for was, not to be relieved from ennui, not merely to enjoy, but to feel, to kindle. It was not Jean or Paul who had had this sudden uplifting experience, this swift impulse of improvisation. It was I who had seen and felt and understood.

Without the music, the end of my story would not have worked itself out, but would have gone on existing still in the vagueness of dreams; it might have contrived to get itself finished somehow, but not with this clear vision.

I did not see Paul again that night. Mr. Rose and Mr. Bell kept their places in the box, and one was on my right side, and the other on my left as the Chesters led the way to the carriage.

It was a week before he came, and then he was in a dull and depressed mood, all the color gone out of him, as he explained it. He was still engaged on his play; up to the end of the third act it had written itself; then the idea began to elude him. He "could n't see the wood for the trees."

"I wonder," he said, "if you would like to read what I have done with it so far."

"I have not much leisure just now, but" —

"Take your own time. I want to get outside of it a little. The trouble with my brain is that it will work with all the sweep of an inexhaustible steam engine up to a certain point, then the machine seems to balk. I have to put on the brakes and try to run more slowly."

He had brought "the thing" for me to read, he said. I was not even to look at it until he had gone. I was indeed not to give it a glance until the right moment came — the moment when I was ready to be in touch with him. He carried the little packet over to the desk and laid it down. Then, dismissing the subject, he asked abruptly if I had enjoyed "Die Walküre."

"I considered that I was unfairly treated," he said. "At the end of the second act Mr. Darcy came over, and told me that Jean wished to speak to me. I expected to go back to Grace and you. I wished to go back, but Bell and Rose had fastened themselves there. Not only I but Warren was kept out."

"Mr. Chester went to sit with his sister," I explained.

"No doubt Bell and Rose knew very well what they were doing. At any rate, if they talked to you, I could look at you. I constantly see fresh possibilities in you. Let me be frank, cousin Marcia. Up to that time I had not realized that you were so beautiful. You are always a splendid creature, but that night you were a beautiful woman."

"Oh, I have no wish to be beautiful," I said. "I have no time to be a beautiful woman. I have too many other things to do. Being a beautiful woman must be such an engrossing occupation."

He laughed. "You seem to affect it with surprising ease. You dress so well. Now Grace is, I take it, one of the best dressed women in New York, but she does not shine you down."

"Let me confess that I used to be dreadfully careless, then all at once I decided hereafter to take more pains. I was reading about Rahel Von Ense. For years Rahel had worshiped Goethe, and appreciating his genius as no one else did, she had made every effort to have all Germany love and appreciate him. Goethe recognized the fact that it was to Rahel he owed this fuller recognition from his countrymen, and he was anxious to meet her, and she had always had the greatest possible desire to meet him.

Finally it so happened that he was passing through the place where she was living, and he called at her house. It was towards noon. Rahel had risen late and, arrayed in an old black peignoir, was just finishing dressing her hair, when the great man's card was brought to her. She had such a feeling of profound homage for Goethe, that to have kept him waiting for a moment would have seemed to her almost an impertinence. Accordingly she walked straight into his presence in her shabby black dressing-gown. Then when Goethe's eyes fell on her, her swift instinct that he found her unsuitably and unbecomingly dressed, inspired the most intense awkwardness. She could hardly utter a word, bungled in whatever she tried to say, and felt that she was giving him the most erroneous idea of herself."

Paul was listening, his chin sunk on his breast, and with a look of benevolent half amusement in his blue eyes.

"The incident came home to me," I said, "so I determined to make my peace with clothes once and for all."

What he said was, "I wonder what Goethe thought of Rahel in her plain black dressing-gown. More likely than not he did not observe it. He would have been intent on the woman herself."

"The point of the story is that *she* minded. I

simply have one or two good gowns in order never to have to think of the matter of clothes at all."

"I do not imagine dress makes much difference; you could not dress ill. You are an achieved effect; you are the inheritor of all the greatness behind you; it shows in the way you look and talk and act."

"All which is utter nonsense," I replied. "I have not lived all these years for nothing. I have heard the most unvarnished opinions concerning myself ever since I was a child. Go and ask all the people in Swallowfield."

I quoted John Pearson's opinion of me as a "critter." "Now that seemed high praise from John," I added, "and I like to be liked as a human being."

"Who is John Pearson? Another of the endless procession of admirers?"

I explained that John was Mr. Bickerdyke's man of all work in Swallowfield.

"After all, I know actually very little about you," Paul said now with apparent discontent. "Of course you must have many friends of whom I have never even heard."

So much I easily granted.

"Perhaps lovers of whom I know nothing?"

I half smiled at this. I was amused by his mood to-night.

"I long to be very impertinent," he suddenly exclaimed. "May I?"

"I do not believe you wish really to be impertinent."

"I long to ask if you ever had a proposal of marriage."

I met his glance quietly. "Yes," I answered, with outside seriousness, but with no little inner amusement. For it was to Gay that I said mentally, "I thank thee, Roderick, for that word," which enabled me to display my prowess as a woman.

"Did you accept or refuse?" he asked sharply.

"What do you suppose?" I asked in my turn.

"Are you engaged?" the question came like a pistol-shot.

"Only to do Miss Keogh's work," I answered cheerfully.

He jumped up, seemed to shake himself, walked about the room impatiently, then came back to me, and observed in quite a different tone, "Do you know what Grace said to me before she saw you, and has reiterated half a dozen times since? — *That I was not to fall in love with you.*"

"Well, you have n't fallen in love with me," I said with indignation.

"No, no," he said. "I know my betters. You are too good for me. I should not dare to fall in love with you." He stood looking down at me, and a half smile passed between us. The clock struck ten.

"I am due at a theatre party," he said. "I must get there in time for the last act, for there is a supper at Sherry's afterwards."

We did not shake hands. He went out at once. I sat for a little time just as I had sat when he looked down and said he should not dare to fall in love with me. Miss Keogh called from above that she was tired and was going to bed at once. Was I coming up? Not for a little while longer, I told her; there was some work I needed to do.

We said good-night to each other. I heard her close her door. Andrew made his round, shuttered the windows, put coal on the fire, and set the high brass guard in front of it. I asked him to bring me a glass of water, and when he brought it, he set it on a little table by the desk. I rose now, and went over to the desk where the packet of manuscript lay. I took it up, and glanced at the handwriting, which was fine and clear, each stroke full of energy and character.

Not until I held the unfinished play in my hand did a feeling come over me of devouring curiosity. But I said to myself, "No, I will not read it to-night," and then again, "No, I must not read it to-night." I was conscious of some unusual feeling; was it fatigue or was it a little excitement? At any rate, I was not in that sort of cool and critical mood which would enable me to see the merits and demerits of anybody's work, particularly of Paul's. The very fact that

the story was mine made me the more reluctant to take it up. Suppose I were to find that he had missed the meanings the plot had for me? Suppose I were to see my clear ideas in a mirror which distorted them? I had felt that in giving my story to Paul I was testing my own work. Now I had a clear sense that in getting it back in another shape I was offered a clue to Paul's subtleties and mysteries.

Literature is nothing if not a confession. It is such a testimony to one's grip on actualities, to one's keenness of vision, to one's refinement of taste. Is it not indeed one of life's little ironies that sometimes, on putting down a printed page, we are left wishing that our dearest friend had kept back his revelation? The gods had spoken to me that night when I listened to "Die Walküre," and had revealed me heights and depths in my story which I had not known before. It would have been a miracle indeed if Paul saw it as it had been revealed to me in its entirety.

"Not to-night," I said to myself, "some other night when I am in a calm, cool, judicial mood." And without looking beyond the list of characters I put the sheets in my desk, locked them up, turned out the light, and went upstairs.

I smile now as I remember how within an hour I stole down again; pulled the portières close, lighted the lamp, took down the high guard from the fire, and drew an easy chair and

a table in front of it. Then I unlocked my desk and drew forth the play, sat down before the fire with the lamp and the table at my right hand, and began to read. It had been of no use to try to lie down and go to sleep. My half-hearted mood had vanished. This was my hour.

I need not have been afraid to test Paul's ability. All doubts of his power to write a good play vanished after the first three pages. His grasp of the situation was admirable; the characters were well defined and went through their individual rôles with no little piquancy. More than once I stopped to smile over the elaborate stage directions, where he had quoted my very words. The various *dramatis personae* were mine, although he had given some of them a different setting. The dialogue was occasionally mine, but he had made it more incisive. The first act was clean and clear-cut as a diamond. The second act began well, then declined, the motive seemed lost; the characters floundered a little; there was no action. Some turns of the dialogue brightened the effect, but there was a groping for definite aim. The third act was a mistake altogether; obstructions got in the way; the obstinate fact remained that the play did not move.

I saw what the trouble was; it was not his own story. He had not struck it off from the fire of his own thought. He had seized the lighted torch, and it had gone out. The plot was mine, the

characters were mine, and I alone held the key to them and their problems. I was ready to say that they cried out with insistent eagerness to be set free from this dull cold limbo in which they lost all their warmth and breath, all their sense of movement, of life, of passion.

I found myself walking round and round the room framing sentences for the letter which I must address to Paul, giving him here a touch, here a hint, and there let in the light of high noonday as to what was needed.

It would be so easy for him to do it all if I could but make him clearly see what I saw, feel what I was feeling. I turned round to the long table behind me, where lay a great pad of legal note, and took up a pen. It would be perfectly easy to sketch the four acts, to make a "scenario," as it is called. But with the pen in my hand I longed, instead of describing, to make the play alive. My eyes had seen, my ears had heard, my mind had conceived the thing. I must try to work it out. It leaped forth as if it had been a fountain gushing from a spring. I was hardly conscious of the mechanical exercise; my pen flew; it could hardly fly fast enough to set down the words which came as if winged almost without my bidding. All sense of laboring under any sort of nervous excitement had vanished. Every faculty and sense was actively alive, obedient, and at my service. The mere act of compo-

sition gave me pleasure such as the athlete feels when he uses his muscles in running. From time to time as the room grew colder I instinctively jumped up and paced up and down for a moment to get rid of a little numbness, then was conscious of the returning warmth of my blood, like a swimmer emerging from the chilly sea. I knew that the time was passing: more than once, looking at the clock, I measured the remaining hours of the night against my unaccomplished task.

It was not quite five o'clock when I finally gathered up the loose, widely scattered sheets, put them together, and numbered them. I did not stop to read what I had written. It seemed as distinct in my mind as the image developed on a photographic plate, as if it would remain visibly impressed on me forever. I put my work into a huge envelope along with Paul's, addressed it to him and stamped it. Then I stole down the staircase, along the hall, where one crimson eye out of the electric bulb seemed to watch me, and laid the packet on the great salver of Benares brass. The moment I had done this, the silence of the night and of the house began to make itself felt. The ardent pulse of life vibrating in me received somehow a singular shock. It was as if something were moving, as if there were low mutterings. I cowered as I passed the great curtained doors, thinking of the monstrous figures inside the rooms I knew so well, as if the

hideous and multitudinous life crowded together there were threatening me. I ran upstairs like a hunted creature, darkened the library, put back the guard before the fire, and crept to my own room and into my bed. I fell asleep instantly. When I awoke it was past eight o'clock, and I knew that the package must have been taken away by the early postman.

CHAPTER IX

MY PENNY OF OBSERVATION

I DID not follow the play even in my imagination. Indeed, looked at by the calm light of day, all that night seemed an extravagant dream. The girl who came to do typewriting was waiting for me when I went downstairs, and for two hours I dictated letters to her, After that task was over I sat down stubbornly at my own work in the rooms below, which had now reached the point of numbering and describing the Japanese images and curios. I had my little table set before three of the images of Buddha. I made no pretension to fathoming their mystery, but when one looks and looks and studies and studies one finally attains to some share of the idea. At least I liked their smiling calm. I was sitting thus occupied when Andrew brought a note from Paul. It contained just these words, — no more: —

"I see what your opinion of my poor play is. Forgive my presumption. P. D. C."

I did not quite understand. I had a helpless bewildered moment. I had not let myself think of my work of the night before — whether it would

turn out success or failure. It had not been an experiment; it had no dubitative life; I had felt that it was an achieved fact. It puzzled me that Paul so utterly disregarded it. It was a mistake, then; this creature born of a divine frenzy. I had been carried away by my own vanity; I had believed that I was doing something to please Paul. He had not only rejected it, apparently, but it had vexed him that I had set aside and repudiated his own version of the story. He had told me that he would welcome my criticism, accept my condemnation. Besides being hurt, I was sensitively conscious of having shown indiscretion, want of tact. I had always been a bungler. I always overdid the thing; never economized myself; never gave my reluctant fastidious best, but poured out just what came in such overflowing measure that it ran disregarded into the sand. I was not a lucky person; whenever I had set out to surpass others I was always beaten. I had had plenty of defeats before; indeed, if any poor success happened to come it was only after a thousand hits or misses. I felt disheartened, with a horrible sense of helplessness and loneliness. I pressed my hands against my eyes to shut back something, surely not tears, that made them burn.

"I will not cry," I said; took up my pen, and looked straight up into the face of the bronze image before me. It was curious how it seemed

to answer me with its smile which had the knowledge of a thousand years. I felt all the tranquillity and strength which comes from experiencing everything, accepting everything, remembering everything, forgiving everything. I had lately read the inscription on one of these images: —

"If a man conquer in battle a thousand times, and another conquer himself, he who conquers himself is the greatest of conquerors."

I smiled back. What did it matter whether Paul cared or did not care about my play? After all, I had had my fine moment; I need envy no one. I had for once looked down on the kingdoms of the earth. I went on making the note concerning Buddha of Kamakura, whose smiling face, "placid like a deep still water," offers the key to the mystery of all aspiration for the supreme calm, the infinite rest.

"Let what is broken so remain," I quoted to myself, over and over, trying the panacea of self-control and self-suppression. What was broken was the incredible illusion that I had accomplished anything worth having; what I had done in a whirlwind had vanished like the whirlwind. Something had, it is true, blazed up in me which seemed like a true flame, — just that vivid flash of emotion which gives life to a play, a poem, a novel. But how many other young writers must have had the same ecstatic self-

belief; so many, indeed, that Dean Swift's advice, "Whenever you think you have done anything particularly fine, strike it out," has passed into a truism. I was ready to laugh at the whole episode as absurd, before I saw Paul again. I do not feel sure just how long the interval was. But one day I had gone out, as was my habit, at four o'clock. I had work to do at the library, but I found the afternoon so beautiful I decided to walk up the entire length of Riverside Drive. I could not afford to miss the beautiful lights on the water. The warm spring wind blew up the river, and where the sun struck the ripples the water ran like fretted gold. But that was only one part of it; the far reaches of the river were blue, the blue like azure with veinings of lapis lazuli. And still beyond these were placid stretches which were sheets of mother of pearl, a vision of opal and amethyst and emerald and sapphire. The feeling that winter was over, that along with the re-awakening of nature would come presently the bursting forth of flowers, stirred me luxuriously. I had just the sense of pleasant weather which we all experience, in common with dogs and birds and kine. It was still early in March, and I knew that this was no sure advance of spring, only a coquettish allurement put forth to show what charms lay behind the half repellent moods from which we were yet to suffer. I loitered consciously; it was worth while to relax

under the softness of the air and the mild spring sunshine. The note of loneliness made itself felt, and my thoughts tried to turn to something intimate and homelike, — something they could nestle in. I could only think of Swallowfield, and wondered whether the river was running high, whether the lane was overflowed with the spring freshets, and whether the grass had begun to grow green on the slopes above the orchard.

Something came up behind me; something touched my shoulder. I turned and saw Paul. He was laughing, and was flushed and out of breath.

"The happiest guess," he cried, still panting. "The man said you had only gone a quarter of an hour before, and I remembered your telling me that you liked to walk here when the weather was pleasant."

"It is certainly pleasant weather to-day. I never get over the relief of this outlook. It gives New York all the fascination of the foreign cities where they always make so much of their rivers."

I said this as Aunt Mary might have said it, or Lilly. He did not listen to my commonplaces. What he wanted to say without losing a minute's time was that not until very late the night before had he come upon the three acts of the play which I had written. Up to that moment he had taken it for granted I had simply sent back his own production. He had found it no easy matter

to accept my silence, which seemed to show such utter disdain of his own performance. In fact, so curiously did he rehearse my own feelings for the past few days I could have laughed, except that this bubbling up of pure joy brought something with it, pure joy, yet rising beyond joy. After all, I was not so unlucky as I had believed. Paul liked what I had written.

What had happened was this. He had found the big envelope I had sent him in his letter-box when he came in, and, tearing it open, had drawn out the sheets of his own handwriting, and, vexed and disappointed, had thrown the whole thing aside, wishing never to see or hear of it again. But the idea of the play had pursued him, and the night before he had told Brockway, the manager of the Muses' Theatre, about it. Brockway advised him to finish it, and on going home and looking up the package Paul had then found out that I, too, had been at work. He could not sleep after reading it; had longed to come to see me early that morning, but imperative business had kept him away. Over and over again he said, "How did you do it?" and over and over I answered, laughing, "It did itself."

But I went on to explain that his first act had struck the keynote. It was no flattery for me to tell him that what I had done had been the direct emanation from his own idea. I knew nothing about the stage. The story came to me in

the way stories do come from the ends of the world, but it would never have occurred to me to put it into the form of a play. I had simply to follow the lines he had laid down. There was a sort of benediction in the idea that I had done something, and for Paul. He talked on about the play; he was enchanted with it; it was full of dramatic force; there was hardly a scene which was not "good business." How did I do this? How did I manage to get hold of that? How had I worked up the whole to such a perfect, such an inevitable climax? He had had the instinct all the while that there was just such a climax, but it had eluded him. How had I achieved it? How had the perfect, the irresistible idea seized me? Then when he spoke of me as the author of the play I disavowed it. It was not mine, it was his. My work had been just a lucky accident; it was too casual to count. It was his play. But would I not divide the honors of authorship, — let it be known that we had collaborated? Distinctly no. What I had done, if it had any worth, was altogether a free gift. If I had helped him I was very glad. There was no altruism, no renunciation in the matter.

"I prefer that no one should know anything about my having had a hand in it," I said. "It is your play. I am only too glad if I helped."

"You mean that I may work it out exactly as if it were mine, and offer it to Brockway?"

"That is exactly what I mean. It is your play, Paul."

Thus we talked while the sunset lights first made little flickering tongues of fire along the ripples in the river, then died out. He confessed that a month ago he had had a wretched sense of disheartenment, and until I had shown him my fragment of a story he had half believed he would give up all literary ambition, and decide to stick to his profession. But the moment he had my story, he knew that he could write a play if he had something to write about. And up to a certain point he had not disliked what he had done, but he needed my help. He wound up on the subject of collaboration.

"Critics like to insist upon the necessity of the inevitable in art," he said, "but one has only to read the lives of authors to discover that there is no end of patchwork even in masterpieces. Balzac was always crying out for ideas, but particularly for facts. Imagination is apt to be misleading unless it is well balanced by careful observation and real knowledge. The Duke of Wellington said of Warren's 'Ten Thousand a Year,' 'It is evident enough that the author never had ten thousand a year, and never knew anybody who had.' It is more than probable that the famous Waterloo chapter in 'Vanity Fair' would never have got in had not Charles Lever made a similar attempt in his 'Charles O'Mal-

ley,' which set Thackeray to thinking how it ought to be done, and might be done. The spark of originality is in the individual author; the inevitability lies in its finding combustible matter."

He had been talking rapidly, and rather excitedly, more to himself than to me. He paused a moment, stood still, and looked at me.

"From the moment I first saw you, I felt that you were to be a powerful factor in my life," he said. "And, Marcia, I verily believe you like to help me."

Yes, at that moment there was a sense of benediction in the air. Everything was friendly, soft, caressing; the lion played with the lamb. My heart ran over with a grateful sense of being young and strong, and with the power in me to work with Paul or for Paul. It was time to go back. I had forgotten all about my errand at the library. When we turned the sun had set, and although the west was one luxurious splendor of gold and rose, the river ran dark and rayless, and the wind blew chilly. We walked rapidly, not saying a great deal. When we reached the house he said:—

"I wish I might go in."

I asked him to come in and dine with us. Did we mind his not being dressed? Not the least in the world. Miss Keogh, indeed, would prefer it. Oddly enough whom should I find sitting, waiting for me to return, but Gaynor Lee? He

and Paul had met at Swallowfield, and they now shook hands. I knew that Paul was disappointed and perhaps vexed to see "that boy," but Gay's feelings I made no attempt to discover. I left the two together, and when Miss Keogh and I came down, dressed for dinner, they were talking with some animation, and, of all subjects in the world, — upon the situation and prospects of my Western lands. They continued to talk all through dinner, and both talked so well that Miss Keogh and I were glad enough to listen. Paul had of course more experience, more weight. He was fertile in suggestion, apparently candid in discussion, but swift in alternation, and I more than once suspected that his wish was to lead Gay beyond his depth. For nothing could be more varied than the topics suggested: the equilibrium of Europe, the destiny of Russia, nihilism, socialism, classical education, the development of the university, the future of women, equal education of the sexes and classes, scientific discoveries, and the future of motor cars. Not once did Gay parry the thrust offered; he took the whole brunt, and I was proud to see that he was so thoroughly up to all points of the game. Although Paul did not resemble Goliath, Gay more than once reminded me of David, he flung his pebble so neatly; and he hardly stammered once. Paul waited until nine o'clock, then with a look of despair said he had to go.

Gay stayed on. I had not seen him to thank him for certain foreign catalogues which he had procured for me, and I could tell him now that they had been of the utmost service. I was sitting on one end of the wide deep davenport covered with dark red Utrecht velvet, in the library, and when Paul went away Gay had seated himself at the other end. It seemed to me that his manner had grown a little stiff and formal now that we were alone together.

"Oh, that was nothing," he said. "I made inquiries. I knew that of course there must have been similar catalogues made of similar collections. It is well to begin right. There is always an expert way of doing things."

I told him of certain present difficulties looming up before me. I said that Mr. Bevis had been studying up authorities on the subject, but, so far, had not succeeded in finding all I wanted. Gay made a note or two. He was kind and helpful; nobody else had done so much to make things easy for me, and I told him so.

"Not even Chauncey?" he asked quietly.

"Mr. Chauncey knows nothing about eastern mythologies."

"No more do I, until I set to work on the subject," said Gay. "He is a lawyer, is he not?"

"Not just a lawyer."

"Not just a lawyer?" Gay repeated with half satirical emphasis.

I should have felt it premature to say that Paul was ready to give up the law to become a dramatist, but I tried to make it clear that he had a distaste for some of the best paying work in the profession and so limited himself to a certain line of cases.

"I suppose you mean that he is not a corporation lawyer," said Gay.

"No, indeed."

I saw Gay's face in profile, and I observed that twice he opened his lips as if to speak, then a sigh escaped him. Finally he turned and looked straight at me.

"Are you engaged to Chauncey, Marcia?" he asked, and there was such a look of trouble, almost of anguish, on his face, that I leaned towards him and touched his arm.

"No, no, no, no," I said. "Don't think of such a thing, Gay."

"Chauncey is thinking of it," was his reply.

Something urged me to combat the idea. "He is not thinking of it in the least. You do not understand, Gay. Paul is my cousin, the only relative I have on my father's side that counts. He has my father's name. From the first, that seemed to bring him very near. We were easily friends. I may as well explain, too, that I have helped him about a play he has in hand. He came in to-night to talk it over, and that accounts for his being here in this intimate way.

I could not endure, Gay, to have you carry away that utterly false idea."

"I should be glad enough to feel that I am wrong," Gay said. He sat still for a moment, then went on. "Of course I understand that he has everything that I have not. I — I — I c-c-can see that a girl might well fall in love with him. He makes me f-f-feel so young, so insignificant."

I laughed. "You talked so well, Gay, that I felt proud of you! Mr. Chauncey is considered rather brilliant in conversation, but you held up your own end all through."

He looked at me dumbly. It was clear that some feeling had him in its clutches, flushed and paled him, tied a knot in his throat. After a little while he said, —

"It was stark audacity on my part. I longed to measure myself against him." He hung his head. "There is only one way I can surpass him," he said in a low voice. Then, when I did not answer, he went on, "Generosity is not in my line, Marcia. I know that I ought to rejoice that you have this friend, this cousin who brings all the prestige of the name you love so well. But I cannot do it."

Even while he said this I was sure that he cared so much about me, he could begrudge me nothing. And what he had said of Paul made me smile. Paul took life in a different way from

Gay, whose loyal idea it was to dedicate himself, to have simply one motive, and one goal. Paul needed a many-sided life. To him existence must be a continuous initiation, must offer perpetual stimulus. Then, too, Paul was over thirty, while Gay, not yet twenty-one, still suffered from a boyish sense of awkwardness, dullness, inferiority.

I was amused afterwards to find that Paul, in spite of his superiority in years and in experience, had not been without his own share of curiosity concerning Gay.

"That is a clever youngster," he said. "He is about seventeen, is n't he?"

I said he was older than seventeen. Paul went on putting questions, and called him more than once, "that bright lad," remarking, with no scant appreciation, that his mind seemed to have the far vision and the swift dart of a hawk.

CHAPTER X

"LOVE GOES TOWARDS LOVE"

I DO not know how love comes to other people, to actual people that is, not in plays and books. To me it seemed all at once flood tide. I had been quite honest with Gay. The idea of Paul's loving me and of my loving Paul had had no place in my mind that night.

Paul came frequently to see me, and for the next month we spent an hour or two each evening working up certain parts of the play. Copies were made on the typewriter, and then we studied it anew, finding weak spots which must be strengthened, obscurities which must be made clear and vivid. More and more something of real force and meaning emanated from the little drama, not to say a powerful charm. Often we stopped and looked at each other, penetrated, thrilled by the same joy in our work. The story was mine. I still understood the logic of it better than Paul, but the scenario was his; he had adapted my plot to this swift dramatic movement. Even now our aim was constantly towards some more brilliant, more staccato effect. I realized that a play is to a novel what sculpture is

to painting. I might say that the drama is like the Greek pediment which to the Greek mind represented the law of fate, with definite boundaries which must not be surmounted or surpassed.

Our way was to sit opposite each other at the long library table, each with a copy of the play. But one evening it so happened that he took a place at my right hand, for I had been making certain changes, and we needed to go over the pages together. Except in the way of enjoying his swift response to my idea, I was not thinking about Paul at all, when suddenly he brought his hand down on my wrist with such a compelling force that I looked up at him startled. Then meeting his eyes I grew conscious that something excited, tumultuous, had come into his mood. He spoke in a low voice, for indeed Miss Keogh was at her desk in the next room not ten yards away.

"Does it mean anything to you that you are helping me at every turn? That you understand me as nobody ever understood me before, — can divine my thought, piece it out with yours, — give expression to it? That, in fact, you hold the keys to me?"

"We must be like each other in certain ways. I suppose it comes from our having each a strain of the same blood."

"From a very far-away fount. I take it we

are exactly third cousins, — nothing nearer than third cousins."

"But all the same we have a feeling of belonging to the same family. It has helped us to be good friends and comrades."

"Good friends and comrades, no more?"

"To me a comrade, a friend, is a great find," I said.

"It is not enough for me," he answered. He was smiling, and the light in his blue eyes dazzled me; and his tone was so imperious that, combined with his look, my sense of his nearness oppressed me. I drew my hand away from his strong clasp, upon which he jumped up and went back to his place on the other side of the table.

"I did not mean to frighten you, Marcia," he said. The light falling upon his face from above put his eyes into shadow, but, even thus gloomed over, I felt their kindled glance. "You know I did not mean to fall in love with you," he continued. "Grace soon saw that I was carried off my feet by my admiration for you, and was not slow to warn me. No, I did not mean to fall in love with you."

I looked back at him bewildered. What did he mean? What was he finally to say? It was the strangest interruption to our placid intercourse; it was indeed puzzling and unwelcome. No sense of any dominating feeling behind his words assailed me. He had told me before that

we were not to fall in love with each other. Were he to say, "Now we will resume our work on the play," it would have given me a sense of relief. I waited wondering; as if it were a dream of something happening which I was powerless to avert by a word.

"You see," he said with an odd sort of inflection, "we are too poor to marry. We can't afford it, either of us. Each of us ought to try to do a bigger thing for ourselves. I have sometimes gone away from you saying that I could just simply admire you, enjoy being with you, and not spoil your life for you. All the same I am in love with you."

It still seemed to me dreamlike and unreal. I could not have uttered a word.

"Why do you smile?" he demanded. "Are you laughing at me?"

"Yes."

"You are laughing at me! Is it because I am so illogical, — because I say in one breath that I am in love with you, and must not fall in love with you? But there is something in my lack of logic more logical than in sticking to hard relentless logic. The actual fact is that I fell in love with you that day at your house in Swallowfield. I went down before you the first moment I saw you in your simple white frock, carrying yourself like a tall, splendid child, but with the look and movement of a princess. Then, too,

that glad blush on your cheek, and the smile on your lips, and your hair just drawn back from your forehead and massed in a big knot! I loved you then, and I have loved you every minute since. I have never admired any woman a quarter so much in my life. The way you look out of those eyes of yours,—the way you rise and come towards me,—the way you speak!"

I answered nothing. I think I smiled.

"Say something," he said.

"But what am I to say?"

"Oh, I know that you are proud, that you tell yourself I am a haggler, a bargainer. I may have seemed to you a dull lover. But, Marcia, I am not a youngster to be carried away by the first impulse. I know life, and I know that a man's career is at the mercy of accident: he is swayed by so many opposing influences, he has to bow to so many imperious overmastering needs. I have always had a disrelish for poverty. After my father died we were very poor until my mother married. I am no boy, and I know what the necessities of civilized human beings cost. I have thought of you too. You are at the age when every possible ambition of yours may be gratified by a suitable marriage. At times,—for instance, when I have seen you with Jack Bell or with Felix Rose"— He broke off, and brought his hand down on the table hard. "But not to-night. I have tried to wait, I have tried

to combat the sense of fatality. Even fatality must be looked at sharply, possibly detected as a fraud. A man does not always know what is heart, and what is temperament. Temperament plays a terrible part with human beings."

It was as if he had been thinking aloud, and these disjointed sentences seemed to drop from him without his volition.

I decided to speak at last. "There is no fatality about our acquaintance, Paul," I said. "We can go on being good comrades, cousins, and friends, and that is enough. No man's career, and no woman's, should be at the mercy of some half imaginary and half accidental feeling."

He laughed, passed his hand over his face, jumped up, walked about a little, and then said, as if addressing one of the marble busts on top of the bookcase, "She says there is no fatality about our acquaintance. She says that the careers of men and women should not be at the mercy of a trifle like an accidental feeling that is half imagination. She does not seem to know that I want just one thing in the world, and that is to marry her even if we go straight to the devil." He came back to me, and stood looking down. "I have tried to fight it, I have tried to deny that there was anything real in it. But my love for you is just the one real thing in my life, and it is killing me — it is killing me."

I seemed to hear him speaking as if out of some remote distance My finger-tips tingled strangely, my heart was beating loudly in my ears. I heard the doorbell ring downstairs, and Andrew's voice at the door. Then I knew that the man was coming upstairs with some message. All that seemed near, but Paul, although he was so close that he almost touched me as he stood, seemed far off.

"I am simply asking you to give me your life, Marcia," he said. "That is all. We can be poor together, work together, perhaps gain some sort of success together. You see I count on you to do everything for me."

Miss Keogh was advancing into the room. Some one had come with a story of suffering at home. She wished to tell me about it, to talk the matter over with me. Paul, with a knitted brow, and hardly troubling himself to go through the formality of taking leave of us, went away on the instant. There was little reality to me about his going or his staying, but what was real, what was urgent, was the story the man had come to tell, of his wife in travail, unattended, except by a neighbor, and his four children almost starving. Somebody whom Miss Keogh had relieved more than once had sent him here, and Andrew and I went back with him.

It was almost one o'clock before I returned from my errand, and then I went to bed and fell

asleep instantly. Once I woke up with a sense of sudden light, and heard Paul's voice saying, "I want just one thing in the world, and that is to marry her even if we go straight to the devil." Then again, "It is killing me — it is killing me." Although this sudden recollection startled me out of my sleep, for a moment invading my whole consciousness like a wave, then like a wave it receded. I turned on my pillow and slept again.

Yet when I woke up in the morning, it seemed as if the feeling I had had for Paul, ever since I first heard his name and saw his face, had grown in the night like Jonah's gourd. I understood now what my liking for him had stood for. I accepted the subtle indescribable significance of his having come into my life. It was inevitable that he should be to me, and that I should be to him, more than anything else in the world. His very name bound him to me; and at this moment it was as if I had always known that he was to come, and, without precisely comprehending, I had depended on his coming. Something in my resolution to save the place in Swallowfield and to make old things live again had been part of my belief in Paul; part of my wish to feel that everything that had belonged to the Dundases and Chaunceys was not lost. It seemed a perfectly simple matter that Paul wanted me to marry him. I felt happy and grateful that life had given me this happiness, this dedication of

myself. I made no effort to explain any inconsistencies in Paul, to ask why when he had once resolved that we could not afford to fall in love, it had afterwards proved to be so easy a matter.

I was glad that the interruption had come the night before, that he had had no opportunity to ask me if I loved him. His look, his tone, his whole manner had startled me then. I should hardly have known what to answer. To-day I knew that I loved him.

Sometimes I had felt a passing pang of envy for those girls whose only motive in life is to find constant enjoyment, for whom somebody stands ready to remove every impediment in the way, to pour out money like water. But no girl who had been so sheltered, so shielded, could have felt just what it was now to put out my hand and find Paul. Just as friend and comrade I would have given him my free, glad service. To realize that he wanted me in this closer, surer way gave me an expansion of consciousness. I grew instantly more interesting, more important to myself; more human, more womanly. Had I not loved him, just him, Paul, before, I must have loved him now, out of sheer gratitude that he had brought to me, along with this new thrill of happiness, a fresh appreciation of myself as an individual being.

He came in before nine o'clock that morning, and stood waiting in the hall downstairs

until I came down. We did not even exchange greetings, — simply looked at each other, and I led the way into the next room.

"I needed to speak to you a moment," he said. "I have not a minute to stay; I have all sorts of business on hand, but first of all we need to settle this matter."

I was standing, I remember, before the three great temple lamps, and on each side reached out a vista of strange gods. He looked at me very gravely and sweetly.

"Somehow, Marcia," he said, "it seems to me that I could not love you as I do unless you loved me." He waited a moment, then leaned forward. "You do love me a little, Marcia?"

"I am afraid I love you too much," I said.

He smiled as he might have smiled at a child who pleased him, then he put out his hand and let it rest on mine.

"From the first moment I saw you, straight, tall, like a proud careless child, with those eyes and lips full of poetry, I have felt that there was but one woman in the world. You must make a man of me, Marcia."

"I love you already just because you are a good man, a clever man, a great man," I said.

He shook his head, laughed, and went away at once. Afterwards he would say, "I do not believe I ever properly offered myself to you, Marcia. Let me do it over again."

CHAPTER XI

MY DEAREST FOE

One is never quite sure that one deserves one's friends, but one generally knows that one deserves one's enemies. Never in word or deed had I injured Jean Darcy, but from the time I first saw her as a child, — although then, Heaven knows, I pitied her, — I had never liked her, had never believed in her. I had often found her amusing, piquant. I had enjoyed her just as by the law of contraries when one is warm one enjoys a bit of ice melting in one's mouth. From the time we were fifteen until we were more than nineteen we had been together, — first, at a large boarding and preparatory school, and then at college; and, as if by sure fatality, we had been always in the same classes, partly because we stood in the same grade of scholarship, and partly from the odd circumstance that our names both began with D. She experienced, as I did, the fatality of this everlasting juxtaposition. She often compared herself to the little imp that had haunted a man so long that he finally gave up home and land and name, and went to the other side of the world. Then, sitting down, he said,

"Thank Heaven, I am here!" and the little imp perked up its head and said, "Yes, we are here."

However, Jean had her own way of enjoying me. For one thing, unless she had had me to compete with her she could not have felt her triumphs to have been of so much worth. She always went just beyond me; her arrow entered the bull's eye, while mine only grazed it. Thus she found a sure zest in my society; she oscillated round me, apparently, candidly eager to get at my affections, trying in the cleverest way to win my confidence; then when she did not attain her object, usually smothering her wrath in a satiny softness which was her attribute, but at times finding relief in a flash of lightning or a clap of thunder. When I came to New York, in the autumn, it had been Jean against whom I had been most eager to shut the door. If any one came in Jean would come, that I knew. And I felt that I could not just yet bear the burden of Jean. Inevitably, just as soon as any one was admitted, Jean made her way. It was always with her an imperative matter to see me and tell me something. With her, things were always happening: not a day passed without an exciting incident or adventure.

Thus there was nothing incredible in the fact that she contrived to get past Andrew and invaded the sanctuary, one morning at the beginning of April, while I was at work in the alcove.

What Jean always said of the collection was, "What an assemblage of horrors! It makes my flesh creep. Now do you really suppose, Marcia, that one single piece here is genuine? They do such clever forgeries nowadays."

The possible forgeries were beyond my domain. Indeed, it turned out that the late Nicholas Keogh had known very well what he was about, and had made few mistakes; but Jean's suggestion was sure to rob me of satisfaction, at least for the moment, even in the most beautiful and curious things.

On this particular morning she was herself such a beautiful apparition she might well have challenged the ugly monsters I was cataloguing. She was dressed from head to foot in white, with white fur wrappings, and looked exquisitely pretty, delicate, and luxurious. I had not heard her come in, and it was not until she touched me that I turned and looked at her.

"Here is the little imp," she said gayly. "Am I interrupting you? Your eyes look as if you were having the most perfectly delightful time."

"So I am. I have had a successful morning."

"How so? Do you mean at your work?"

"Of course at my work. What else have I to be successful about?"

"Why do you have to work so hard? They say you are not actually poor at all."

"I am actually very poor, — that is, I need a

great deal of money which I have not got. Accordingly I work just as hard as I can."

"Well, at any rate, somebody told me that you have only to sell a dreary old place in the country to be able to do all you please and go where you like."

"Who told you?"

"I dare say it was Mr. Chauncey," said Jean. "He has often talked about you. When he found that we were actually ancient chums he asked all sorts of questions about you. I sometimes have a fancy," she leaned closer towards me with eyes and lips full of laughter, "that he is no end of an admirer of yours."

"For what? For not selling my place in the country and going where I like and living as I please?"

"Oh, I dare say. He says that you are thorough. He would probably be enchanted with your thoroughness at this moment, for you have two smudges of ink on your face, to say nothing of your hands."

"I beg pardon. But if you had taken the trouble to let Andrew announce you I might possibly have made myself neat."

"Quite as possibly you might have declined altogether to see me. The man said you were engaged, but I told him you expected me."

"I am at home on Saturdays from three to six. Why not come then?"

"I often do mean to come, but there are so many other things to do. I want to see Miss Keogh. She interests me. People are saying that she will make you her heiress."

"She will not make me her heiress. She has distinctly other views about her money. I assure you of that. She is thirty-seven years old; she will no doubt marry; quite as likely as not will outlive me."

"But what is her craze for giving away all her money? Papa read it out of the evening paper that she has given away, since the first of the year, I cannot begin to say how many hundreds of thousands of dollars."

"That is an exaggeration. She is anxious to do good with her money."

"If I were you I should put in a few strokes of the oar for myself."

"But then, Jean, you have a good conscience and feel that you deserve a great deal from other people. Now I should not have a good conscience about taking other people's money. I want only what actually belongs to me."

"You mean that I have n't any conscience," she cried sharply. "I see what you mean."

I was sorry for my words. "No, I did not mean anything. It was just a phrase," I said. "Sit down, Jean."

I drew a chair nearer to the table where I had been at work. It was an old English chair of

black oak, and she made a lovely picture against the high richly carven back.

"But I have a conscience," she insisted. "You don't really know me, Marcia. You never will believe in me. But sometimes I wake up in the night and hate myself, cry over myself. I feel as if I were so wicked, so false and heartless, as if I only spoiled things for people."

"Does it make you long to atone for your misdeeds, or do you desire to do something different, something that you have not tried yet?"

She burst out laughing. She had a charming way of laughing, wild and sweet.

"But tell me," she said, "if Miss Keogh goes on giving everything away, she will presently have nothing left for you to do. It is said that the collection is to be distributed between Southern and Western universities" —

"I took the position because it was a temporary one."

"What will you do when you leave the place?"

"Set to work at something else."

"What sort of work?"

"I should like to be able to tell you. I myself long to know."

"Why not marry?" She looked at me with eyes brimming over with mischief.

"Why not, indeed? Now that I think of it, why do you not marry, Jean?"

The mischief overflowed.

"Does anybody want me?"

"One could hardly be as attractive as you are for nothing."

"Oh, could n't one? But I do not wish to marry. Marry? I should think not. I do not know one young married woman in New York who is contented. It is just simply a bondage, — a bondage to a husband, to children, to servants, to an income that will not half cover expenses. There is just one career I really long for. If they would only let me go on the stage I should not wake up and cry in the night."

"You are still haunted by that dream?"

"It is only now that it has fully taken possession of me. That is what I came to tell you. I have been studying a part. I can think of nothing else. I jump out of bed in the morning and begin to rehearse it, and I am going through it all day. Nothing has ever pleased me so much. If you promise not to tell Mr. Chauncey I will show it to you." She wore an elaborate little bag covered with white and gold beads at her belt, and now took from it a dozen sheets of thin paper crumpled into a small roll. "You will not tell Mr. Chauncey, will you, Marcia?"

"What has Mr. Chauncey to do with it?"

She whispered, "It is his play. He has shown it to Brockway, and Brockway says he has done the thing at last. He has tried it before, but failed. I have read all that he has written, and

although there might be bits which went very well, it was only patchwork; the plot would not hang together, and the characters would not do what they set out to do. Now he has got a firmer grip on things. The whole action lives and moves. It seems to me actually a masterpiece. He and I and Grace Chester have a scheme. If she can get Mr. Chester to say he does not object, she will let us bring it out at Marshmallows, their country place, in June. Brockway will be asked up to see it, and Paul is sure that he will be eager to get hold of it for the autumn."

But if what she was telling me was in a way familiar, Jean's telling it made it seem strange and unfamiliar. I could not help smiling. She exclaimed, —

"Why do you smile? I thought you would be interested. What I came for to-day was to ask you to hear me go through my part."

"Why to me? Of what use could I be to you? I never go to the theatre."

"That is the very reason. I consider you a purely rational being without any affectations. You see things steadily and see them whole. The part was made for me. Mr. Chauncey said that from his first conception of Corisande he heard the very tones of my voice declaiming each sentence. What he has always tried to do was to write a play that suited me. He says that there is not one young actress on the stage with

the dramatic instinct and intuition which I possess. This part suits me. I love it. What I am afraid of is being too much stimulated by it, — I get wound up, as it were, and run into exaggerations. So I need, before I recite it to Mr. Chauncey, to test myself a little. I want you to correct me; you may criticise me as savagely as you like."

It would have been strange indeed if, when she held out the part, I had not felt a sharp prick of curiosity. I took the slip of paper.

"I am Corisande," she said. "Is n't it a charming name?"

I assented. "What is the name of the play?" I inquired.

"Will you promise not to tell?"

"I shall make no promises. If you cannot trust me, don't come to me."

"Why do you laugh?"

"Why should I not laugh? You come to a person of plain and exact common sense" —

She interrupted, "Oh, I can feel always that there is no end of force in you beyond your plain and exact common sense, if I could only get it out of you. The trouble is, Marcia Dundas, that you will not believe in me, — will not take me seriously, — will not float me as it were with honest good-will and appreciation."

I requested her to waste no more time but to begin; assured her I was ready to believe in her

powers as an actress, and to float her on an immensity of admiring good-will. She set about it at once. She gave the story of the play as a preamble. She did it cleverly, seizing every point, and giving it its true value. There was something striking in the way she dwelt on certain niceties, and enlarged on certain broad effects. She wished me to understand it fully, she said.

It was clear that she had read a good deal of meaning into the part of Corisande. I was almost ready to confess that she saw more in it than ever I had seen, had sounded deeper depths of consciousness, reached wider horizons.

She set about rehearsing her lines very simply. Paul was right. She was an actress. Each note of her voice, each touch of emphasis carried weight; it was beautiful, true, convincing. If at first she was a little too painstaking, presently she surmounted the barriers, and gathered strength and freedom. Action calmed her spirit and set it free. I caught my breath more than once. It was a tremendous concession, but I was willing to concede that the play without her rendering had been like a silent score of music until the performer comes.

The paper had dropped from my hand. I sat gazing at her.

"Well," she said, in quite a different tone, "how did I do it?"

"Admirably."

"Honestly now?"

"Honestly, Jean, you surprised me! You took my breath away! It seems to me that your interpretation of the part is very fine."

"All which is incredible to you! Hitherto you have believed that I was a mere puppet, dancing by wires, and had no feeling whatever." There was a clear note of triumph in her voice. "Don't you see now," she went on, "why it is I long to go on the stage? In myself I am nothing; but give me words, an idea, I can act up to it. Papa and mamma think that I have only to take life and people as I find them, to be tremendously interested. They would like me to marry and settle down and give them two or three grandchildren. They do not know me in the least. They have not got it in them to know me. I have something so different in my make-up. Mr. Chauncey always says that at heart I am a thorough bohemian. He is another, and that is why we have the same spirit of adventure, the same revolts, the same ambition to get something out of life that is not humdrum. I hate to go on day after day being just myself. I long to get out of myself, to be all sorts of people. Acting Corisande is an outlet to something that is in my blood. And when it comes over me that somebody else will act it unless I really summon up my resolution to break with every-

body, and go on the stage, the thought almost kills me."

She was kindled by the part she had rehearsed, and this confession was partly the result of her ardent mood. What she told me was the key to not a little that I found incomprehensible in her. I had not thought of trying to make any answer, but she suddenly flashed out, —

"I can see that you consider my acting tawdry and my confidences absurd."

"Your acting struck me as wonderfully good. All that you were telling me interested me very much. I seemed suddenly to see how deeply rooted your instinct for the stage actually is."

"I wish I could act your part for a moment," she frankly retorted. "I wish I could sit there with your wide-eyed equanimity, so kind, so crushing, so insolent, so *grande dame*" —

"So that is the way you sum me up!"

"I could not show your equanimity, my eyes are set too close together. It needs that splendid bovine breadth between the eyes to make clear your contempt for me and all that I stand for."

"Contempt for you!" I stared at her in amazement. "Why, at this moment I have a deep admiration for you."

"Yes, as a clever little mannikin, wound up, and running by means of a crank."

Her swift alternations, her half laughter, her anger, her spite, left me cold. I fumbled for

something to say, and explained that if I had seemed silent, it was only that I had been trying to analyze what it was in her that with such sympathy, insight, and capacity of emotion made her such a clever actress.

"You never believed in me, never cared about me," Jean reasserted with an air of intense conviction. "Now Dorothy loved me always."

"Oh, yes, Dorothy. And you love Dorothy."

"Dorothy believes in me. I tell you, Marcia Dundas, it puts all sorts of wickednesses into my head to see you sitting there with those big brown far-apart eyes. I long to do something to make you hate me. Anything rather than have you survey me with that air of crushing indifference."

She put up her little hands as if to guard herself from the blight of my glance. I laughed outright. I had not the least feeling that there was any actual meaning behind her words.

"You are a feverish creature," I said. "It is a pity I am not clever enough to act up to you. Reflect that I have no time or thought to spend in these little comedies, and feel sorry for me."

"Feel sorry for you? I only wish I had the chance once."

The archness of her malice disarmed me. I went on, —

"Jean, I always say frankly that in whatever you and I have undertaken together you have invariably beaten me."

Her wet eyes glancing out from behind her handkerchief were full of mischief, but she wailed, —

"I have beaten you? Never, never, never!"

"Don't you remember getting ahead of me in the European history competition?"

Another vivid lightning flash of a glance, and a little smile going off the corners of the lips, but still she asseverated, —

"Never, never, never!"

"And don't you remember the Curry prize, and the French contest, and the honors for English literature?"

Still she would confess nothing but failure, and I said to myself that perhaps she did not remember, for I knew how with myself one defeat rankles deeper than can be reached by the elation of a dozen victories.

"But you surely remember," I was about to persist when she suddenly broke out with, —

"If I could only have beaten you once honestly, squarely. But I never did and I never shall. Without any effort you do in one moment what after trying all my life I die of longing to do."

She flung herself on her knees before me and fell to kissing my hands.

"Little actress," I cried with real indignation. "But I have to confess that you do act surpassingly, and I know that you will carry off all the honors as Corisande."

"Little puppet, wound up and running on a string! That is what you think of me, and only that," said Jean. But Andrew had come with a message from Mrs. Darcy that Jean must not lose a moment or they would be late for lunch at Mrs. Sidney Bell's.

CHAPTER XII

AT MARSHMALLOWS

When I reached Marshmallows at three o'clock on that June day I was met by a note from Grace saying that the whole party of people were asked to the Lamberts' to lunch and to rehearse the play, and would I forgive the deserted house and make myself at home? What I did was to give my wrap and bag and keys to the man and maid, and then, with only a glance at the charming vistas leading up to adorable rooms on either side, I walked straight through the wide hall and came out upon a stone terrace, round which ran a balustrade, set at regular intervals with huge vases each holding a crimson rambler rose in full flower. What had drawn me had been the glimpse of blue sea: the tranquil waters of Long Island Sound lay spread out before me, and I sat down feeling perfectly contented. I liked this pause, this interval. I had only three days to spend with the Chesters, and I was glad of this opportunity to sit and think, indeed to dream.

The great occasion was that the play was to be performed the next night. Paul and I had kept all our secrets to ourselves. No one but Miss

Keogh knew that we were engaged to be married. No one knew that I had anything to do with the play. Grace and Mr. Chester had asked me to come to Marshmallows just when I could, and I had said I should like to be there when Paul's play came off. Paul's play! There was plenty of interest and piquancy for Grace in the fact that it was "Paul's play," and she was not surprised that I too had some curiosity about it. It really was "Paul's play" to me now. It had passed beyond my cognizance; had been discussed, clipped, hacked, and hewed by half a dozen other hands. To Paul and to me there must be always the consciousness that it was *our* play. It was not simply an idle coincidence that we had worked together; what left its deeper meanings in our blood was that we were to go on working together. We had debated the question as to whether Grace and Mr. Chester should be told of our engagement, and had decided against it. I sometimes felt that Grace knew; she could hardly have helped guessing, but, in her way of letting me be sure she had guessed she was charming. If she had eagerly desired that Paul should marry a rich woman she seemed ready to bear the disappointment of his marrying not only a poor woman, but one incumbered with an inheritance which to most people seemed a burden, an impediment, rather than an asset. What we had decided to do was to keep our engagement

to ourselves until the play was actually staged. Until then it must be an anxious time of preoccupation for Paul.

I could not help thinking about Paul, as I sat on the terrace. The feeling that we were to be for three days under the same roof, seeing each other from morning until night, half stifled me. I was very young; I had worked hard, and I did so long for a little recreation. And now the beauty of the season and of the weather, the lovely trick of effect that the blue sea made as a background to the roses; the song of the birds, even the zigzagging of the white butterflies in the sunshine gave me a welling up of pleasure. Indeed, the ever-recurring thought that Paul was to make a part of all this, that we were to enjoy it together, was almost too tormenting. It went to my head. I sprang up with sudden restlessness and walked along the terrace to the English garden, just at hand, where sweet-williams, Canterbury bells, foxgloves, larkspurs, and Madonna lilies were blooming in rows — aye, "rows on rows." I ran down the steps to look at them, and was hanging over them in rapture when I saw Warren Chester approaching. He had just come by the train, and had walked from the station. He was very cordial; said that if he had only known what train I was to take he would have joined me. I had never seen him before except in evening dress, and had always considered him a

little stiff and formal. Now, in a Panama hat, gray tweeds, and a pink shirt he was quite a different sort of personage. I told him that I was enchanted with his place, and he flushed like a girl.

"I'm a fool about this farm,—that's the fact of it," he said. "I get up nowadays at five o'clock in the morning so as to have time to walk round before I take the 7.30 train. It seems to me that, after his feeling for his wife and children, the love for a bit of land he calls his own is the strongest attachment in a man's blood, and I generally notice that when a man has not got it I miss something in his make-up. For my own part I should like to live here all the year round. There's always something interesting going on, and it is handy to town."

"Cousin Grace would probably think that the children" —

He interrupted me as if he knew that argument by heart.

"Nothing could be so good for the children, but it would not suit Grace. Grace likes it in a way, but society women nowadays seem to be stung by a gadfly. They always want to be on the move towards some other place. We are going to Europe in July. Grace wants the children to have a motoring tour through France. Then when we get back we shall have to be in Lenox. There are certain people in Lenox it is

absolutely essential to Grace's peace of mind to see in September. I sometimes wonder if women can honestly like a thing, right up and down like it, for its inherent quality. Women do not care one bit for nature"—

"Oh, don't they?" I exclaimed, bringing him up sharply. "I am a woman myself, and I have got a place of my own that I love, honestly, right up and down."

"Why don't you go and live there?" he asked bluntly.

"I intend to as soon as I have money enough," I replied. I told him about the place; that the house had been built in 1801, and that the house which was torn down to give it room dated from 1745. He was interested, asked a great many questions, and I found that it was an easy matter to go through the whole family history; to make him understand just how to me the old family feeling was a part of the conscious life of the place, appealing in a way which made it impossible for me to think of giving it up. I told him how my father had loved the house, and how he had written from Johannisberg, "'I dream sometimes of you in the rooms with that low white wainscoting with the railing on top, which made a sort of shelf. I did so like to keep my things on it. And there was a little cupboard with a glass door, at the turning of the stairway, where grandmamma kept a set of delicate glass

dishes with broad gold bands which she only used in the berry season; but which I used to love to look at in the winter, through the glass door as I went up and down stairs, and would seem to taste the strawberries and the red and white raspberries which grew in the garden in the summer.'" So that the house was to me a visible part of my father's life, I explained. Then it occurred to me I had said a great deal and I added, "Forgive my egotistic talk. But your place is so beautiful it has waked up all my own personal recollections."

"Oh I will forgive you," said Mr. Chester. "I am glad to know that a woman can care for a place. Sometimes I think that the trouble with Americans is that their opportunities have run ahead of their culture. By culture I do not mean lectures for ladies, all sorts of knowledge done up in handbooks telling how to get the gist of the best hundred books, how to look at pictures, — I mean culture of the brain, the heart, the soul. It is a queer life women lead nowadays. A man is not in it, — that is, a man who has anything to do in the world. I hear that foreigners say, and I see it quoted in the papers, that the American man is not equal to the American woman. And the American woman is a magnificent and wonderful, an all-round symmetrical creation. She beats the world. She is at once so naïve and so serious. A man goes to his tailor, orders a couple

of suits of clothes and gets them. A woman at least twice a year sits down and looks at stuffs and fashion plates, talks with her dressmaker, gets in despair at having to try on, — which makes her a complete wreck, — is so disappointed in what she has ordered that she has rages, and is reduced generally to a state of pulp, jelly, flaccid collapse. But this is only the beginning: her head has to be surmounted with hats, bonnets, tiaras; her neck hung round with chains, necklaces, dog-collars. There is nothing like it under the sun. It is all very handy for a man when he wishes to please a woman: he is not obliged to fight lions in the arena, but can just go to Tiffany's and order a few strings of pearls, or a set of emeralds, or a diamond tiara, which goes straight to the spot. There is a certain comprehensiveness in the instinct. It is said the Fiji women like it quite as well as the New York women do. Just what effect it has upon women's souls I don't know. However, we men know the beauty of renunciation. We do not sell our goods and give to the poor, but we make all the money we can to pay our wives' bills."

We had strolled on while he was talking; had reached the entrance to the pergola, when he broke in upon his subject to ask me to notice the glimpse of the blue sea at the end of the long vista. He had chosen the place on that account, he said. Then again he had stopped to point

out the beauty of a rose blooming against the background of blue sky. More than once he said, "It was prettier this morning; then the dew was on the roses." But he would go back to his grievance, and I realized that this rambling monologue was the outflow of half-bitter thought tempered by philosophy.

I put in a word finally. "I think Grace flatters herself that she pleases you by wearing the jewels you give her. Should you like better not to have her wear them?"

"I want her to feel she has everything. It would not please me to have her think, when she looks at the other bedecked women, that she had n't stones of equal value."

I had heard Grace give her reason, and here was his.

"Grace surely has everything," I said. "It seems to me that she is an extremely fortunate woman."

"When a man has got a thing," Mr. Chester now said, "he has got it. When a woman has got a thing she has done with it, and wants something else. What for a man is a basis is for her a point of departure."

Mr. Chester never seemed to me to be a man to be argued with. We had come to the farther end of the rose walk issuing upon a knoll full of softness and greenness, falling away behind into a little glen from which rose a hill covered to its

crest with fine woods, but, in front, sloping down to the water, which rolled into a quiet cove. The tide was coming in, and the little waves made curving lines of creamy spray on the white sand.

"You shall sit down there and rest presently," he said, "but first come and see the strawberry beds."

He was proud of the fruit garden, as he was proud of everything on the place. His was a simple, loyal, and homely soul, — the simple, loyal, and homely soul which is the base of everything good and wholesome in the world. He now addressed himself to me: "It is not a bad apprenticeship, this of yours, Miss Dundas. The medicine, the tonic of life, is poverty. I look at my children and have to reflect that I am ruining them for this world and the next by letting them attain easy possession of everything expensive and convenient under heaven, thus robbing them of the impulse to do anything for themselves, to have any curiosity about the reason of things. They hold out their hands all the while for something more, something different, without any notion of getting hold of the worth of all they possess already. It is impossible for them to have any imagination or imaginative sympathy. Imagination is flatly drying up everywhere." He paused a moment, then added, —

"I suppose you consider me a pessimist."

"If I do I always consider that pessimists have

the highest ideals, even if they despair of attaining them."

"You do not despair of attaining your ideals, I hope."

Then without waiting for any answer, "I hope you may always remain optimistic. If happiness could be bought and sold at so much a share, there would be no stock like it in the market. We do need it so terribly, not only for ourselves but for those who belong to us: missing it, we miss everything."

All this time he was picking strawberries, giving me one after another of the largest with the serious air of a mother robin feeding her young. He was very knowing about each variety of fruit and its individual flavor.

"Grace likes the small Alpine strawberries better than these earlier ones," he said; "but in their way these are the best that can be raised."

He had gathered a great many berries into a leaf of rhubarb, and now we walked back to the bench overlooking the water. He went on talking about the gardens and their being planted with a view to yielding flowers, fruit, and vegetables for May, June, and the autumn months. For the rest of the year they represented to the owner an expensive void.

"I have to throw money in," he said with a sigh, "but I do not dislike it. I am hoping all the while that Grace will get over her American

impatience and the curiosity to try the newest thing, and take it into her head to sit down contentedly and bring up the children in peace. But I am afraid there is a restlessness in the blood. I see it in Paul Chauncey just as I see it in Grace. You know Paul pretty well, don't you, Miss Dundas?"

"Yes," I said, feeling a little shy and awkward under Mr. Chester's eyes. "Of course I could begin with him as I began with Grace, on a basis of cousinship."

Mr. Chester proceeded.

"Paul is a good lawyer; there is no lack of ability in him, and they all say that there is no lawyer in New York with a surer grip on the facts of law. If he would only stick to it! But he has this craze for literature, and, of all things, for dramatic literature. There is nothing in the stage that will be good for him, that will help him or hold him. If Paul were to stick to his profession and marry a girl with high attributes, a girl he loved and believed in and looked up to, he would come out all right. He has always been afraid of losing his freedom, of being pinned down. What I hold is that until a man is pinned down he is good for nothing. A man must concentrate his faculties, ambitions, affections. It is only then he finds out his powers and can grow and expand in the right direction. Yes, I hope with all my heart that Paul will fix on some fine girl."

All the time he was speaking his eyes traveled over my face with an increasing look of benignity, and I was conscious of additional warmth and color.

"I hope so," I remarked cheerfully. One of Paul's arguments against telling Grace of our engagement was that if she knew it Warren Chester would know it. At this moment I felt sure, whether Grace had or had not an inkling of the truth, that Warren Chester understood the whole matter very well.

"They have come back," he said, rising. "Now just sit here and look at the Japanese irises, and eat these strawberries, and I will go and send Grace or somebody out to you."

It was Paul whom Mr. Chester sent.

I saw him slowly cross the lawn, skirt the water-gardens, and then come slowly along the rose-walk towards me. Even although I missed in his look and mien certain signs and tokens of lover-like gladness, I liked to watch his languid advance.

"Oh, it is you," he exclaimed, with apparent bewilderment.

"You evidently expected to find somebody else?" I returned.

"Grace told me you had come but had gone to your room," Paul said. "How singular of Warren! He told me he had picked some strawberries for me and that I should find them on this bench."

"Luckily I have left a few. Sit down and eat them."

He was still under the effect of his frank surprise.

"Did you tell him?" he inquired.

"Tell him to send you to me? Certainly not."

"No, I mean, did you tell him how things stand between us?"

"Certainly not."

"Evidently he suspects it. He would not have given me just that quizzical look unless he felt sure I was interested in you. The reason why I thought he had better not be told is that Warren is so downright that everybody would know the fact of our engagement in an hour."

I perceived now that my pride had got the better of my candor.

"Let me tell you exactly what Mr. Chester said about you. He was deploring your interest in the stage and wished that you would attach yourself to your profession and marry some fine girl."

Paul had sat down at the end of the bench, and now, leaning towards me, rested his left elbow on the seat and his chin in his hand, and looked up into my face, while with his right hand he took the strawberries one by one from the broad leaf lying in my lap.

"Some fine girl," he said. "Of course he meant you, Marcia! Some fine girl! That sounds

exactly like Warren. And I am certain that the moment he spoke of my marrying, that look in your splendid proud eyes, that beautiful glad blush of yours told him as plainly as any words could tell that we are somehow tangled up together. I perceive now that his invitation to me to come and eat strawberries was full of romantic suggestion."

"The irresistible spell did not seem to be working on you," I retorted. "You crept towards me step by step as if painfully coerced. I thought of the Frenchwoman who, when she saw her lover come slowly round all the angles of the square, reflected that the time had been when he took the diagonal in a frantic rush, and so said to herself that her day was over."

For answer he looked up and smiled, and the sweetness of his slow smile, and the fire in his blue eyes seemed to answer me.

"I am glad you like the berries," I continued. "I should never have thought of sending for you to help me to eat them. I am not sure that I was not glad to sit here all alone. The place is so beautiful. Ever since I came I have longed to have a chance to sit down and look and think."

Impossible to tell how pleasant it was to have him claim all my strawberries, to have his smile claim me, to feel his nearness, — the sense of my being his and of his being mine.

"I hoped that you would be well dressed," he now remarked.

"Oh, did you? Are you sure that I am well dressed?"

"Absolutely sure. It seems to me that nothing ever became you like that gray." He was silent for a moment, but his glance did not leave me. "At this moment one impression of you swallows up all others, — that you are at this moment splendidly set, —you jewel of jewels, just as you deserve to be."

"This place is beautiful! Still, when it comes to my having a suitable background, how could I possibly desire anything more splendid than the temple lamps and the gods and demigods of the Keogh collection?"

"When I go there and see you — the girl you are — toiling away in that grotesque environment, I always say to myself that it does become you. But nothing could make you dwindle into insignificance. You are just yourself; still, you stand for something that is not easily effaced, —for the old family, the old home and prestige, the old money-bags."

"When we have refilled the money-bags"— I began with a little sigh.

"Let money-bags go at this moment. What difference does it make? Look at the divine way the west is lighting up, and how the sun gilds all the little tendrils of the vines and strikes

that sheet of water! And see the doves darting and wheeling against the blue! They are a part of it. Just to sit here at this moment with the strange glimmer of a sense that I have only to reach out my hand and clasp yours — well, why not, nobody is looking?"

"But somebody is looking, or might be looking."

"And the same glimmer of consciousness lurks in the corners of your eyes and lips; Marcia, confess that this is not to have lived in vain!"

I was used to Paul's fastidious self-scrutinizing attitude even while he longed to snatch at present enjoyment. I had my triumph in the feeling that at this moment he saw it clear, — this joy in our being together, in this thought that we were always to be together. My appeal to life and its conditions was less exigent. I was so used to getting every bit of color from any rift in the clouds that the sun could find its way through. We had been engaged for more than two months now. It had not been a time of love-in-idleness. I had determined not to be dominated by one thought all day, "When will he come? Why does he not come?" but to take his comings, whether constant or occasional, with frank pleasure. All things have their price, and I was ready to pay mine. Paul had a life of his own to lead, and until it should be merged in mine I must accept absences and silences with-

out feeling puzzled or baffled. Now we were together, and he himself had said that this experience was worth living for. We could see the sea, the shore, the garden, the woods, the splendor of the great skies. It was just the time in the afternoon when the thrushes sing sweetest and the orioles, flashing from tree to tree, also poured out their strains. Yes, something exquisite, something unapproachable belonged to this hour. As he had said, it was not to have lived in vain since we had had this.

"Don't you wish it was all ours?" he murmured just above his breath. "Don't you wish all these people were a thousand miles away; that the house was ours, the water, the flowers, the trees, the nests of the happy birds, — all a part of *our* nest" —

Almost jealous for my own place I cried, —

"But, Paul, we have our own house and trees and flowers and water, our own nest, whenever we decide that we can go and live there."

He turned a glance half suggestive of lazy scorn towards me. "Oh, that Swallowfield place! Like an oak-tree, you are rooted there."

"I am content to be rooted there, I love it so, the beautiful old house, the gardens, the orchard, the hills, the river, and the woods."

"It is your fetish."

"My fetish? Well, perhaps it is my fetish, and if you love me you will love my fetish also."

"But I have my own fetish. And my fetish is love, freedom, expansion, getting rid of everything that cramps and hinders. What I should like you to do at this moment would be to sell that place, and then we might marry at once. I could throw off the burden of my law business, and we could give ourselves up to congenial work together."

"Paul, I do not like to have you say that you wish me to sell that place."

"We have not the money to live there. Without some incredible success it would be impossible to make money enough to enable us to live there comfortably. Looking the matter squarely in the face, even you, Marcia, must grant that that Swallowfield place represents what hinders our marriage, cramps our lives, spoils our happiness."

"Oh, Paul!"

"If you would sell it (and I have taken pains to ascertain the fact that that offer still holds), we can fling all other considerations to the winds, can be married at once and go abroad for the summer, and return in time for the play to be rehearsed in September."

I did not answer; the thrushes were still singing, the orioles were still singing, but the joy had gone out of the song: there was something too piteously sweet in it, it broke my heart.

"Have I convinced you?" he asked, leaning towards me.

"No, Paul; on that point we differ."

We looked at each other, both smiling, but something made my eyes overflow.

"No, we do not differ; by Jove, we do not!" he exclaimed with sudden vehemence. "In my right mind I am with you all through. I could not love you just as I do without those ancestral pieties of yours. It is the Plymouth Rock in you that I worship. Sometimes the devil urges me and takes just that tone. I am not good enough for you, Marcia. Always remember that I told you I was not good enough for you."

I did not try to answer except by a look. Indeed, to have taken seriously any such confession would have been to show that I lacked all feeling of proportion, all sense of humor. We simply belonged to each other; that was enough. We sat there luxurious with happiness, and might well have longed to say to the passing moment, "Stay, for thou art so fair."

Then came a sound. "There goes the dressing bell," said Paul. "Wait a little, wait till the whole crowd have gone to their rooms." He looked at me and laughed. "No doubt plenty of people were inquisitive as to what Warren's whisper to me was about, and to go back together in full view would be too naïve a confession. Now, if we were to be married in six weeks we might afford to parade our engagement. What I hate about a house-party is that

one has always to be the butt of allusions, jokes, attempts at wit."

I was far enough from wishing that the gauzy veil which floated between us and the future should be touched, handled, lifted, all but snatched away by sordid comment. I decided that it was better for Paul to leave me here and himself go back by way of the stables. I continued to sit for quarter of an hour, listening to the thrushes' final song, and the twittering notes from all the young birds in the trees. When I did go in Grace met me with some anxiety. The electric lights were beginning to glow and to put out the spent fires in the west.

CHAPTER XIII

MILLIONS OF MISCHIEFS

THEN followed the evening.

Jean Darcy flashed in upon me, before I was through dressing, to tell me about the play. Mr. Brockway had come up that morning to attend the rehearsal, and had been struck, — oh, how he had been struck by her acting in the part of Corisande! She was deliciously pretty, aerially pretty, as she flaunted her triumph in my face. What she wore always defied my knowledge of textiles. To-night she was in silver and azure, something floating, diaphanous, glittering. However, she pulled about my white mousseline gown, which was lying on the bed, with some signs of approval.

"How nice it is that you are here," she said. "It has been just a little poky. Mr. Chester does not approve of me, of that I am certain. I long to do something to deserve his ill opinion. That sort of right up and down goody people always make me feel wicked."

It would not have occurred to me to argue the point with Jean, who bristled all over with her little impertinences. Mr. Chester was Mr. Ches-

ter, and Jean was Jean. I should not have expected that they would ever come near enough to each other to clash.

I had no quarrel with Jean as she went and left me to follow. By this time the play seemed to be hers. Except through my sympathy with Paul, I had no feeling of having part or lot in it. It did cross my mind that if Jean were to make the success of the piece, and the success of the piece were to become a factor in our future, Paul's and mine,—why I should have to endure the fact that she was a mysterious indispensable ingredient of my existence; accordingly make my peace with fate and begrudge her nothing.

On my way down I stood for a moment at the top of the staircase. Except in the luminous upper skies, it had grown dark out of doors. Inside, all the house was aglow with soft light. As I listened and heard the sound of voices from below I felt timid and outside of things. Then while I descended the broad shallow stairs I began to be stirred by a sense of youth, of happiness in the present and hope for the future. Quite a group had gathered at the foot of the stairs to greet me. Mr. Chester and Grace and their four beautiful children, the oldest boy ten and the youngest four, with two girls between, hanging about and pleading for just five minutes more before they were dismissed; the Sidney Bells, Jack Bell and Mr. Rose, besides the Dar-

cys; also Jem Nicoll, my old friend Jem, Gay's friend, too, just a boy still, only nineteen, but a handsome brilliant boy, full of promise.

Mr. Chester took me out to dinner, for I was the latest guest. Jack Bell sat on my right, his charge being Amy Chester, Mr. Chester's niece. Mrs. Darcy was on the other side of the host, and all this group at the head of the table at once fell to discussing automobiles. The Darcys were just on the point of buying a new one and asked advice of Jack Bell, who was a first authority on anything connected with motors. He had also recently been accumulating every kind of experience concerning a tour through New England, all of which interested the Darcys, for his progress had been a triumph over burst tires, wettings from constant showers, arrests for overspeed, and suits for damages, all of which difficulties being plucked from that nettle, danger, had been full of exhilaration. Half the fun of motoring, according to Jack, comes from the fact that you are constantly expecting something to happen, and that generally something does happen. You are always listening for a note of alarm, there is always some risk to plan for and contrive against.

It was "something to do," they all agreed. The curse of labor is on all humanity, and if you only have something to do you are happy, and with nothing to do you are miserable. Mr. Ches-

ter sighed and wished, and wished and sighed, that he felt sure enough of his powers as a driver to undertake the motor trip through France without a chauffeur. It would be so much more interesting to him, but there was the question whether it might not prove too exciting for Grace and the children.

This talk, absorbing and profitable as it no doubt was, did not fully engross me. I could look out of the great windows, wide open to the blue gulf of darkness extending over the water, broken here and there by the signal lights of the moored boats and the reflections of the stars overhead. Paul had come up to me in the drawing room to shake hands and exchange a word as if we had not met before. He had the third seat from me, — he was indeed between Amy Chester and Laura Cummings, — and I could see that he was eating his dinner in a quiet absorbed fashion, listening first to one and then to the other of his neighbors without talking himself. I looked at him with a certain critical interest, missing something in him. Even while I watched, Jean Darcy addressed him from across the table, and he woke up. His whole face changed; something conscious and fully comprehended passed between them at a glance. Whether the look, the allusion, and the talk that ensued concerned the play I had no idea. I only realized with an absolute comprehension that Jean was at this

moment intensely interesting to Paul. Of course it was she on whom the success of the play depended. She was a creature full of variations of mood and whim, and it was essential that she should be propitiated, kept up to a certain high water mark of self-satisfaction. She was sitting between Felix Rose and Jem Nicoll, and was talking in a way that held the attention of both the mature man and the eager boy. She was, if not actually beautiful, a brilliant piquant creature, and, as she turned her head from side to side, her look suggested the flash from the facets of a gem.

The dinner, well-ordered, simple, excellent, perfectly and swiftly served, was over within an hour; then Grace led us out to the gallery where we were to take our coffee, and we sat down in a sort of loggia projecting from one end of the drawing-room. Looking inside could be seen four bridge tables set out with shaded candles and fresh packs of cards and counters. And all the time we were drinking our coffee Jean was canvassing for players. Mr. Rose had followed the ladies, and she was entreating him to make a fourth at the table with Grace Chester and Jack Bell. He steadily declined, answering her repeated entreaty with a curious sort of smiling negation. "I am going to talk to Miss Dundas," he said, "if she will let me," and when the others rose and went in he sat down beside me.

Then, when we saw that all four tables had filled up, and that half a dozen of the party were hovering about as if eager to look on, he whispered to me, —

"Come a little farther away; I want to tell you something."

We walked to the end of the long gallery which overlooked the water. The moon was just beginning to make its light felt.

"Do you know what that little demon is up to?" he asked me.

"Little demon?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Jean Darcy. She knows that Warren Chester abhors gambling, and she is determined to make Mrs. Chester play for money."

"Oh, Grace would never do it," I exclaimed. "Mr. Chester dislikes the very idea of a woman playing for money."

"That is just the reason" —

"I have faith in Grace."

"So have I. But I also know that that little demon, permit me to call her so, can make most people do exactly what she likes."

"And she has planned to do this?"

"Half a dozen people have bets laid on it."

I wondered if Paul knew. However, I put my trust in Warren Chester's wife. Grace might have felt an occasional impulse of restlessness, of rebellion, might catch the tone of some of her

intimate friends who, wherever they went, found the wrong weather, the wrong air, the wrong sort of people, and were always longing to do something different. But Grace had real dignity, real force and sweetness, not to say good taste. So I said that Jean was clever, prodigiously clever, still she could not alter the movements of the stars in their courses.

Mr. Rose waived the subject and began to talk about the play. He was not to act in it, but twice had read somebody's part just to oblige Chauncey. He praised the piece. "I did not suppose it was in Chauncey. Not but that I know he has plenty of ability. But there are so many men who have plenty of ability and yet never get the pace of the world, so to speak, and consequently never make any real hit. But he has gone beyond prediction. There is real invention in this play, and he is likely to make a good thing out of it. Brockway is pretty sure to take it up. In fact, he would do it in an instant if he could only get hold of Miss Darcy."

"She is eager to go on the stage," I remarked, "but I suppose that Mr. and Mrs. Darcy would never consent."

"She is powerfully influenced by Chauncey. He has written this play for her. He evidently saw clearly all her great possibilities, for the part was made for her, and it suits her down to the ground. It is wonderful how she rises to the conception of

it. Just now at dinner she was saying that acting to her was like champagne to other people."

I said something about one's really going on the stage being something quite different from acting as an amateur.

"She needs just that sort of outlet," Mr. Rose said. "They had better let her go on the stage. She is a born actress, clever if you please, but too full of devices for private life. When a woman is athirst for admiration, for an audience, she will contrive to get it somehow, and it is sometimes better that she should play behind the footlights than in front of them."

We had been standing, leaning over the balustrade while we talked. The moon, looking low and near and full of color, was beginning to flood the water and shores with its splendor. Within, some one was playing the "Moonlight Sonata," and we walked along the gallery to listen. I had heard little music for a long time, and the felicity of listening now was something far withdrawn from ordinary life. The player, whoever it was, had twice gone over the andante, lingering over it as if the divine well-spring of such exquisite emotion were something not to be too quickly quaffed. Then he had begun the scherzo, full of caprice, splendid imagination and vigor, asserting its contrast of grim rough force to the charm of the first part, when all at once, with a resounding crash, the music stopped. It seemed

as if somebody had uttered a cry. Looking inside, we could see that something had happened. Paul was not there. I discovered that fact at a glance. I saw Mr. Chester vanishing at the end of the room, and Grace, very white, standing by the table, almost in tears, while half a dozen people were pressing close up to her.

What had happened was this. Grace and Jack Bell were partners against Jean and Lovell Cummings. It was just eleven o'clock, and at eleven o'clock Mr. Chester always went straight upstairs from his library to bed, usually without saying good-night to any of the guests. To-night it had occurred to him to walk through the rooms. He had possibly felt that an event was in the air, that something unusual was going on. He came up to the table where Grace was playing, and stopped short. Perhaps he detected some air of embarrassment in her and in the men.

Jean was not embarrassed. "Oh, Mr. Chester," she exclaimed, "your wife has had such luck! But lucky at cards, unlucky in love. I owe her twenty dollars, and here they are."

As to what Mr. Chester said and did, nobody was ever quite sure. The truth was probably that he had an impulse both to speak out in anger and to throw back the money at Jean. He took the bills from her, crumpled the crisp notes into a wad, his face black with wrath, his

eyes terrible. Then, in a moment, although they had watched the forging of the thunderbolt it had not struck. The money lay on the floor, and Mr. Chester was leaving the room.

An hour later Grace and I were sitting side by side on the edge of my bed. She had come to my door, shaking like a leaf in a gale, and I had let her in and was trying to soothe her.

"I dare not go to him," she said, "I am so afraid of him. He will never forgive me. He will consider that I have insulted and outraged him."

"He will forgive you. He will be glad to forgive you something. What he is feeling probably is that he has alienated you, shocked and distressed you. He will hate to think that he has spoiled everybody's peace of mind," I argued.

"You do not know Warren. You don't begin to guess how implacable he can be. Right is right with him, and anything wrong is terribly wrong."

"Right is right, and anything wrong is terribly wrong. And nothing is so right as to have you go to him at once, and nothing could be so wrong as for you to withhold your forgiveness from him. You are his wife. Tell him frankly just how you came to do anything you knew he would disapprove of. Tell him that it was a joke, a poor joke, and that you repent it."

"I might easily say all that, for I do repent

it bitterly. I am vexed with myself for being governed by Jean Darcy. It is incredible to me that I have behaved with so little dignity. I feel that Warren is entirely right. He does not wish to have gambling go on in his house; for me to have played cards for money will have shocked all his sensibilities. I seem to know exactly what he is feeling."

"Go to him and tell him so. You are his wife and the mother of his children;—then you are yourself above all, a woman who desires to be as good and noble as it is in you to be."

Still she quaked and trembled; she could not rise above her fears.

"You do not like to feel," I said, "that he is angry and miserable and all alone; not angry with you, for he loves you so, Grace, that he could not be angry with you. Go to him and comfort him."

"It makes me grow cold from head to foot," answered Grace. "It is hard for me to say to him what is in my heart. And I don't like to tell him that Jean Darcy led me on; for he hates her already. Indeed, Paul's play has been a perpetual strain to Warren. He has said more than once that he is afraid Paul is in love with Jean. He was indignant with me for suggesting that she would be a capital match for Paul. He has been eager for the play to be over that he need never see her again. He has been count-

ing the days. He has said to me more than once, that he hoped this would end our acquaintance. And now to have had such a climax as this, and to have her mixed up in it!"

Grace was beginning to think more freely, to analyze the situation. With some resentment she now remembered how Jean had been working up to this absurd crisis by clever little tricks, adroit suggestions, implications of feminine submissions, by all sorts of railleries and provocations. Some dangerous quality in the girl had been apparent to Warren: men did see things more clearly than women, she was ready to grant.

"He admires you," Grace went on. "He said to-night, while we were dressing for dinner, 'Paul is not altogether such a fool as I thought him. I believed he was entangling himself dangerously with that little actress, but I do believe that it is Miss Dundas he is in love with.'"

She looked at me keenly as she said this.

"You don't deny it!"

"But how should I know with whom Paul is in love?" I said. "That is, unless he were to tell me."

Her mind leaped on insistently to the half confession behind my words. She put a hand on each side of my face, and looked into my eyes.

"He told me once that you said he was not to fall in love with me," I exclaimed.

"Ah, that was something quite different," cried Grace. "When I first saw last year that Paul was so carried away by the idea of his new cousin, I may have said that he must not fall in love with you. What I told him was that you needed to marry quite a different kind of man, — a man who could help you to find the lost fortune of the Dundases, — not to marry a Chauncey who would spend in a month more than he could make in a year. However, that was a mere croak. I confess that I have had fits and starts of thinking that if Paul could honestly fall in love with you it would be the happiest thing for him that ever came to pass. But why have you not told it before?"

But I had not told her yet. I simply permitted her to take it or leave it as she liked. Nevertheless, indefinitely a little cheered up, and with a feeling that she had something to tell Warren that would please him, she finally left me, and went towards her husband.

CHAPTER XIV

CORISANDE

Everybody knows Paul's play now. Even if it has had its day it was a long and brilliant one. It turned out to be one of the plays which, from the first, draw and hold an audience with a powerful magnetism: a magnetism which does not lose its force. People had first to see the play, then to talk about it, then to return to it over and over again, with a quickened curiosity, to feel anew its life and emotion. It may be seen that it was a matter of the merest chance that the play held in solution just what proved to be the ingredients of success; but they were there; characters, temperament, movement, technique, and a powerful crisis. These elements of force endowed it with life from the outset.

Corisande had more and more grown to be the central figure round which the whole drama revolved. It has sometimes been said that it was not Corisande that made the play, but Jean Darcy. And at any rate, Jean found in this character her artistic opportunity. She was fervent, mobile, plastic, fluid even to the possibilities of the character. She was suffused with the part,

and played it as by right of a new instinct, a fresh force which informed and combined all the elements of the piece.

The rest of the *dramatis personae* bungled and blundered as amateurs do bungle and blunder, but she floated it to a high water mark of success. The attitude of the audience of sixty people, cool, skeptical, unconcerned, as friendly audiences are apt to be, expecting nothing but the thin echo of a worn-out song; at first complaisant, determined to make the best of things, concoct some sort of encouraging phrase which would pass muster, and not blight Paul Chauncey's effort by too instant condemnation, changed before the first act was half over into a startled wonder as to how he had got hold of such a good thing. By the middle of the second act, with sympathy and curiosity sharply challenged, they were ready to set to work in good earnest not to let themselves be carried away by anything mediocre and amateurish. When the curtain went down on the second act they were quite ready to discuss the piece and to pick flaws. But the moment the third act began they looked at each other, drew a deep breath, and had to confess that here was something fresh, keen, vivid, that held them in thrall. They had caught fire at last, and the fire did not go out, but, burning up and burning down, rose at last to a pure flame. There was no doubt but that it would do. They

had lost sight of the fact that it was not real acting; they had almost forgotten it was Jean Darcy and not Corisande. By a hundred little touches, tones, looks, gestures, postures, she charmed. But that was only the beginning. Part of the secret of her irresistible spell was in her dismissal of what was merely pretty and charming; and the ease with which she rose to the higher conception of the woman was a new thing altogether, a really wonderful discovery.

"Tell me I was great," Jean said to me archly, when I went up to her after the play was over.

"Yes, you were great," I answered.

"Tell Mr. Chauncey he is great, too," she insisted, as if jealous for the author of the play, and I turned to him and gave him my hand.

"I did not at first dare tell you you were great," I said, "but Miss Darcy says I may."

His face showed his kindled mood. He did not smile, but seemed very serious.

"Oh, it will do to call Corisande great," he replied.

Mr. Rose had sat by me during the play, and had come with me to offer congratulations. Others were pressing forward to compliment the girl who had snatched all the honors of victory, and we had to move on, and so it happened that I went with him outside where the moon was flooding the world with light. He had taken a great deal of interest in the play and now liked

to talk about it. I had seen Mr. Rose a good many times through the winter and spring, for when the people whom he knew gave dinners he was one of the men almost invariably invited, if there was a possible place for him; and both he and Jack Bell were intimate with the Stuarts. Two or three times he had come to see me on a Saturday afternoon or evening. His manner was so simple, so friendly, and he talked so easily and well, with the widest possible range of topics, that I always enjoyed his society. In person he was far from unattractive. Of medium height; very slender; his face interesting, if not handsome; the dark eyes expressive, the lips straight and thin; and the nose well set, with wide nostrils. The effect the man produced was that he was intensely critical, and at the same time keenly conscious of whatever was interesting, and did not mean that the secret of anything should escape him. He had read all his life and knew easily all that was good in literature; so about music and the drama, — he was experienced in both. In society he had a certain predominance; he knew very well how to hold his own. His verdict on any point was considered to be of no mean importance.

Thus when he praised not only Jean Darcy's acting but the play, his criticism interested me very much. He had not expected Paul Chauncey to do anything so good; he might have expected

something pretty, possibly piquant: throwing interesting sidelights on modern society. This had breadth, force, movement, charm.

"It makes me feel," Mr. Rose went on, "that Chauncey may after all be right in wishing to throw over his law business and devote himself to literature."

He went on to define Paul's aversion to his profession; said that false sentiment, questions of taste, hindered his being a good working all-round lawyer; which was a distinct pity, for he had the manner, the address, the prompt wit to make himself easily effective. The trouble was he hated most of his clients, and this recoil of fastidiousness made itself felt.

"All that attitude is a mistake," Mr. Rose observed. "A lawyer needs to find every case that comes to him an interesting study: to realize the fact that nobody ever committed a crime, no matter how cruel and mean, who had not something to say for himself in the way of extenuation. These curious self-revelations of rascals sometimes make one believe more in the worth of humanity than one did before. Almost every man alive does cling to something. And the deeper one goes into the case of one's client one generally ends by feeling that he ought to have his chance. The man who is sheltered in Abraham's bosom knows that there have been moments in his life which, had they carried him

a hair-breadth farther, might have been punished by the fire that burns the man who calls out for a drop of cool water. But Chauncey will not see this; he likes only one side of life and no other side of life. But I perceive now that he has this different faculty calling to him and that it will probably bring him success."

I did not think it necessary to argue about Paul's career with Mr. Rose. We were standing at the very end of the wide gallery, and the vision of the moonlight — misty, silvery, magical, in its tranquil loveliness — made itself felt.

"And what I wonder," pursued Mr. Rose, "is whether he will carry Jean Darcy along with him."

"Do you mean whether she will go on acting in the play?"

"Every way — in the play and in his life. He must have coached her. She herself has not the insight, or the breadth to act as she acted tonight. The fire is in her, and she kindled to the part, but Chauncey had impressed her with his own meanings or she could not have done it. He has moulded her to his wishes, and will never be contented with any other Corisande."

I had said this to myself, and I assented quietly.

"And there the fatality comes in, and that is why it is a pity for Chauncey to have made such a lucky hit. One cannot define exactly why

the stage is necessarily deteriorating, but most people do deteriorate the moment they have anything to do with the stage. There was a time when I saw every actress with a sort of nimbus; but all that glamour has flatly departed. A man passes through that phase and then outgrows it. I like a woman who is, not one who acts."

We had turned at the end of the gallery and were retracing our steps, but now as Mr. Rose said this he stopped short, faced about, and looked at me, as we stood still close by the balustrade. Then he observed, —

"I should not suppose, Miss Dundas, that you could act to save your life."

Up to this moment I had had no consciousness of myself. Since I came to Marshmallows I had felt, instead of any challenge to my powers, any necessity for cleaving my way through difficulties, using all my faculties and more than all my strength, — a sense of folded wings. Looking at the sea and hearing the soft persistent plash of the waves on the beach, I seemed to feel it as a part of the universal human heart-beat. I let that ardent pulse beat as if for me. I had been interested in what Mr. Rose said of Paul, also in what he said of Jean. Now when he all at once troubled himself to define me and I looked up and met the subtle mysterious power of his glance, I was suddenly recalled to the necessity of saying something. .

"Am I so egoistic?" I exclaimed, "so utterly without power of entering into other people's ideas that I could not act? I have all my life supposed I had a strong spirit of adventure, although it has so far been permitted little outlet."

"All that I meant was that you are yourself true and stanch and strong," said Mr. Rose. "Certain qualities of a woman enter into a man's soul, make an image of her there. I long to understand you. I do not feel yet that I do fully understand you."

I was half amused to hear him confess that I might have a thousand thoughts he could not follow. His horizon line and mine seemed wide apart. When I said nothing he went on, —

"But I wish that you would try just a little to know me, to let me show you that — I do not mean to presume too far. I can see, Miss Dundas, that you desire to make no slaves, no matter how many lovers."

At this moment came an interruption.

"Oh, here you are," said Paul Chauncey. "What romantic people to be wandering about by moonlight when everybody else is eating supper." He offered me his arm. "Please come in, Miss Dundas. Grace sent me to look you up."

Inside, everybody was sitting down at little tables and eating salads, sandwiches and ices, and drinking claret cup. My allotted place was near Grace, the Sidney Bells, and the Cummingses,

both of whom, brother and sister, had taken prominent parts in the play, also Jem Nicoll. Jem and I fell to talking. There could never be any lack of topics between Jem and me. We talked about Dorothy Deane; about Mr. Bevis, who was Jem's cousin; about his sisters, all of whom I loved; his father and mother, also about Gaynor Lee. Gay was to be graduated from Harvard, and Jem was going on to be present at Class Day. Jem himself was at Columbia.

"Father wanted me to be a clergyman," said Jem, "but I do not think it would suit me to sit in the study as father does and grind out discourses after a text. I should not so much object to standing up in the pulpit afterwards and giving it hot and heavy to sinners."

Jem would nevertheless forego this delightful result, independent of processes. In a year he would be ready to go into electric engineering. Into whatever he did he was certain to put generous force and a noble warmth of blood. We went out from the supper room and sat down together in a cushioned corner seat and talked like two children. Twice as we sat Paul passed us, and the second time he took pains to give me so direct a look that it roused some instinct in Jem, who exclaimed, —

"I can't help thinking that Mr. Chauncey has something to say to you. If he comes this way again I will give him my seat."

Paul did come, and instantly dropped into the place. Jem, with a muttered explanation that he wished to speak to Amy Chester, vanished.

I turned and looked at Paul.

"Well, what is it?" I said.

"What is it? Well, just this, I thought I was engaged to you,—I thought—well, no matter—but I have to wait and listen while another man makes love to you."

"Jem? Jem Nicoll make love to me? He never thought of such a thing."

"Oh I don't mean the boy, although I dare say he also may be in love with you. I mean the other one."

"Not Mr. Rose?" I asked, bewildered.

"Of course I mean Rose. Come, now, you will not attempt to deny that he was making love to you, out there in the moonlight."

"Not the least in the world."

"He was making love to you," said Paul, doggedly. "Do you suppose I do not know men? I not only saw him look at you but I heard his tone, that silly subtle tone of his. What he said was distinctly audible,—he told you that he longed to have you understand him, that you were a woman who made no slaves, no matter how many lovers."

"He quoted that, I fancy."

"What if he did quote it! When a man attempts to define a woman to herself he wants

to show that he and he alone understands and appreciates her."

I laughed with a sudden sense of sheer happiness. I liked to have Paul care so much. I liked almost to have made him jealous.

"Oh, you can laugh," he said, "but I feel as if something had gripped me by the throat."

"Paul, Paul!" I gazed at him in amazement: it seemed as he were in the clutches of some strong emotion.

"Marcia, tell me you do not care for Rose," he whispered.

"I care for Mr. Rose? What do you think of me? I supposed you knew for whom I care."

He caught my hand lying in the folds of my dress between us, and held it there.

"He is a clever fellow," Paul went on. "He has an adroit way of penetrating, getting into the secret of a thing. He has the trick of his trade. Every lawyer in New York dreads to have him on the other side of his case. This is not the first time, Marcia, that I have watched him with you. At one time it was a question whether it was to be Rose or Jack Bell."

"Oh, Paul!"

"I suppose it is partly the necessity of being jealous that is laid upon a man," he went on, always with a curious quiet vehemence, "but it is partly that I am not wholly an egotist; and when you came up to Jean Darcy to-night and

told her that she had succeeded, and that she was great, I longed to fall at your feet and declare that it was you, you only who were great, — that we were robbing you."

"Paul, what utter nonsense."

"And then to follow and find Rose securely nestled in my place beside you"— He broke off abruptly. "I know," he went on presently, with a sudden change of tone, "I know that you are proud, that you are one of the proudest women in the world."

"Not where you are concerned, Paul," I answered. "To-night, when everybody declared you were likely to make a fortune out of this play, I said to myself that it would, after all, make me happy to owe everything to you! That since you were to be the fortunate prince I should love to be the beggar-maid, sitting holding out my hand for alms; and to have you come by and fall in love with me, raise me up, take me in and feed and clothe me. I shall love to have you rich and successful, Paul."

It was growing late. Grace came up to us. Paul had dropped my hand as she approached, but did not rise. Perhaps she saw signs of spent emotion in us. She sat down and talked quietly to us about the play. Mr. Brockway had brought a reporter, and there would be accounts of its success in all the morning papers. Then she went away and left us. There had been a curious

sweetness about Grace all day. She seemed half dreamy, too, as if under the domination of some happy, tranquillizing thought. She had come up to me in the morning, had kissed me and said, —

"I owe you so much." Then, after a long look, she added, "I seem never to have understood Warren before. He is actually the most generous man in the world."

Paul alluded now to the incident at cards. He had had some inkling of what was going on and had taken pains to keep out of the drawing-room.

"It was simply mischief," he added, explaining Jean's part in the affair. "Warren never liked her before; he will hate her henceforth."

He went on talking about his brother-in-law. Warren had tried to make the *amende;* he had said to two or three men that he supposed he had behaved "like a fool," but he had not looked at Jean or addressed her all day long; to-night he had completely ignored her.

"Grace and I stretched a point in asking him to let us try the play here," Paul observed. "Warren bristles with antagonism to anything that has to do with the stage. He hates the irresponsible life."

"Well," — I put in, then met Paul's eyes and we both laughed.

"Oh, I am certain you approve of him," said

Paul. "Warren is a good man, but narrow where his wife is concerned. However, I am inclined to think that unless a man is narrow and exclusive where his wife is concerned she misses something in the love he gives her. I dare say, Marcia," he whispered in my ear, "that I shall be narrow myself."

CHAPTER XV

"IT ALL DEPENDS"

My room overlooked the water, and was so flooded with mellow moonlight that when I was ready to go to bed I extinguished the light and sat down in the bay-window to enjoy it. Presently Jean came tapping, tapping softly at the door, crying like a soul in trouble, "Let me in, let me in." I let her in, although I had locked the door as a precaution against having to admit her. She was enchanted at the thought of sitting in the moonlight, and at once threw herself along the window-seat, propping her chin on her hands and looking up at me with a pretty wildness in her eyes; something both triumphant and appealing was in her manner.

"I am so torn," she said. "I came to ask you to tell me what to do."

"Torn?" I echoed.

"Torn. That is the only word. What am I to do? Until the play was really acted and successfully acted to an audience, the whole matter was in suspense; now the question must be answered."

Brockway had made her an offer. If she

accepted it she would have to sign a paper within three days, binding herself to him for two years. The necessity of looking up another actress to play the part of Corisande in case of her declining was behind this haste.

"It seems to me it would kill me to have anybody else play Corisande," she said. "If anybody played it better I should be ready to kill her. It came over me all the while I was acting that I had never lived before. You may call it vanity, but Corisande is I myself; the better part of me, the great part, the part of me I long to live by."

I said nothing. I waited for her to tell me more.

"I am several other people besides Corisande," she continued. "I admit that. I have got something that leads me into all sorts of sins and freaks and wickednesses. I am a bit of a rogue, — but after all, touch the spot, and I am Corisande."

"You love the part, and the part suits you, that is certain," I said.

"It is curious what a play is; it is not life, — it is not the mere image of life in a mirror. Life is illogical, and the image of life is faint and unreal. In a play all is simple, inevitable. As Corisande I am held as by the law of fate: I can struggle nobly, triumph nobly and reach a noble tranquillity. It makes me long to love just

as Corisande loves, and to be beloved. Did you ever love anybody, Marcia?"

She was a very pretty figure lying along the cushions in the moonlight, and with her one thin night garment folded so close about her figure that it showed all the outlines and her slim bare feet lying extended, one clasping the other, she might have made a lovely recumbent statue. By this time she had put down her head in my lap, and as she looked up at me I could see her face, altered a little by the white moonlight, so that I had to guess at the real expression of the long eyes with the glitter shining between the half-closed lids.

"Did you ever love anybody, Marcia?" she asked again.

"A great many people," I replied.

"Oh, nonsense, I do not mean that sort of love. I cannot imagine you in love with anybody, you are too haughty, too invincible. I think, however, that somebody I know is in love with you."

"You are very good. I thought you were telling me your dilemma about Corisande."

"Oh, it all comes in."

She sprang up and perched on the window-seat, clasped her hands about her knees and began to talk eagerly, fitfully, sometimes eloquently. It was so hard for her to know what she wished to do. There was her life, her whole

life, stretching out before her to the end, and she longed to make it hold all the best things that could be put into it. The Darcys offered her all sorts of advantages if she would only continue to stay with them. There was hardly a limit to what they were ready to do for her. At this moment they were urging her to go to England; it was just the very height of the season, and they all had many friends there.

"I love that side of life," she confessed candidly. "I love it all the better for having been a gutter-snipe until they picked me up. I love to show the people who knew me first as a gutter-snipe that I had it in me all the time to rise out of the mud and mire, like a butterfly out of its chrysalis."

It touched me a little to have her tell me this.

"You had it all in you, Jean. We felt it all the time that you were a brilliant, clever little creature."

Still she went on to say that nothing quite contented her; all the longing, all the thrill in her veins, was for a free, full artistic life. Everybody had assured her to-night that this was but the beginning of a long triumph.

"Mamma says to me, 'You know nothing of what you give up. You are carried away by the fascination of the stage, but you will find it actually a hard and prosaic profession.' She

cannot conceive the new atmosphere, the new life it offers me," Jean went on. "It doubles, trebles, quadruples the meaning of things. I suppose, just as an author longs to word his conceptions, I long to put them into shape: to express my idea with all my brain, sinew, nerve, make all the meaning and the magic of it clear and plain. One cannot do that in society, — I never could. Left alone I am run away with by fantastic caprices. I do not do myself justice."

She paused; there was something irresolute in her mood.

"It is one's life one has to give," she said. "And it all depends, it all depends." She paused, then burst forth, "The trouble is, I do not know what I really feel or wish. Sometimes I think I am in love wildly — passionately; and then again I am not in love at all. There are times when if anybody speaks a certain name I am ready almost to faint. I think of him all day; I sit in a room alone and call his name. I feel as if by repeating it and thinking of him I could influence him, could bring him to me. I say, '*Love me, love me, love me, you must love me! I shall die if you do not love me!*' I am ready to fall at his feet and implore him to love me. I am so eager to be happy, so passionately eager to be happy while I am young. The sense of this, and that he and he alone can make me happy, that everything depends on his caring about me

burns me up like a flame. That is, I feel as if I were being consumed by it. But if he comes" —

She broke off. "Do you want to go to bed?" she inquired in a different voice. "I suppose it is awfully late."

"Go on!" I said. "If he comes" —

"Then very likely I have quite got over my hot fit. He is often proud and indifferent and distant — and I am quite satisfied. He seems to be playing a part and I act up to his lordly attitude by being equally mistress of myself. In fact, I am. When he is near me, even if as sometimes he comes as a suppliant, I only care to play with him, to draw him near and then to put him off. I delight in my own coldness, I say to myself then that I am not in love with him himself the very least in the world, only with the idea of him. When he is not with me his rather haughty and cold reserve seems to me like the lava crust, with fire burning below it. I long to break through; I long to get at that fire. But when we are together I feel as if he were not thinking of love at all. There are a great many other things he is more desperately interested in."

Her tone had grown dreamy. She sprang up.

"I am sleepy if you are not," she said with a little yawn. "At this moment I seem not to care for him in the least. I feel sometimes as if I should pass my whole life longing for love

as I used when I was a gutter-snipe to long for cakes and bonbons in the confectioner's window, and would press my nose against the big glass pane and try to imagine how much I should enjoy eating this one or that one."

She was gone without time for another word.

CHAPTER XVI

LET HIM LAUGH WHO WINS

Next day was Friday, and I was to go back to New York on Saturday. Accordingly as that was to be my last day at Marshmallows everybody tried to crowd it full of pleasures for me. We went out in the Sidney Bells' yacht in the morning, and in the afternoon Jack Bell took Mrs. Sidney Bell, Mr. Rose, and myself across the country, motoring. It amused me to think that to have gone as far as Swallowfield would have been no great effort. Paul had once spoken of the place as "remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow," but had added that nothing was too far off to be easily accessible in these days of motor-cars. I had not seen Paul since early morning, nor hardly Jean. Looking back now at that day, the whole effect is of something confused and blurred. I enjoyed what was passing; the morning on the water had been delightful, and the swift passage over the country in the afternoon, with the panorama of the quiet forests, the wooded hills, the rows of elms along village streets, a weathered stone wall that ran along the road covered with creepers, slow rivers running be-

tween flat pastures, perhaps bordered by rushes, —was full of beauty and suggestion for me. Many a place I saw reminded me of the one I loved in Swallowfield, and gave it, to my mind, a wistful look as if it missed me. Besides all this mental experience, it was diverting to listen to the talk that went on. Mr. Rose and Jack Bell were both very amusing.

Still, from the moment I had waked out of my brief sleep that morning I had felt confusedly and overwhelmingly that something was going to happen. Many things that Jean had said to me, in that hour long past midnight, still perplexed and oppressed me.

We did not reach Marshmallows on our return until almost eight o'clock, and I dressed hurriedly without having seen any one except the little party with whom I had spent the day. I was down just as dinner was announced, and it was Grace who linked her arm in mine and we went out together. Everything to-night was to be informal, she said, so why should n't I sit by her? It turned out to be Sidney Bell who was on my other hand, and the others fell into their places casually. I saw that Paul had sat down between Mrs. Darcy and Jean.

There was an air of spent effort about the whole group. Very little general conversation went on; people chatted with their neighbors. The separate courses came and went; we had

reached the point when dessert was to be brought on, when, all at once Mr. Chester called, in a loud voice which challenged the attention of every one at table, —

"Grace, I am having the glasses filled. I am an old fellow, an old-fashioned, old-fogyish sort of fellow, and I think it is a good custom to drink healths. I believe it helps to keep everything clear, open, honest, sincere; to make everybody understand. I hate all sorts of mysteries. I cannot keep a secret to save my life, and in this particular case I am proud, I am actually devilish proud and set up. So I propose the health of Miss Marcia Dundas, also the health of my brother-in-law, Paul Chauncey, who has the honor to be engaged to her, and thus is bringing her into my family."

It was like the sound of a bugle in the midst of hautboy and flute melody. The note was forced. It seemed to me like a discord. I looked at Grace with utter consternation; she leaned towards me and kissed me, and pressed my hand in hers. "Take it just as Warren means, my dear," she said, "he is so glad, so proud, so happy. And so am I."

I did not dare to raise my eyes to any one else. I felt stunned and overwhelmed. The surprise was too violent. My instant thought was that Paul would feel that it was out of taste, that he might even be displeased. It robbed him of all free play. While I sat thus timid, thus doubtful,

I felt a hand pressed down upon my shoulder, and looking up I saw Paul; Paul flushed, as if eager, triumphant. He had jumped up and run round the table to me. As our eyes met he just said, —

"May I answer for you, Marcia, for us both?"

He stood with his hand on my shoulder while he spoke. He said that his brother Warren liked to let daylight in, and that, as anybody could see, the sudden illumination had taken me (Marcia), at least, unawares. It was all Marcia's fault, he went on. She had wanted to be let off easily, not to have the dreadful, inevitable fate she saw looming at her out of the future come down upon her too swiftly. Some day it might be, was going to be, must be; but she had been trying to stave it off by hiding the idea of the thing in a napkin, under a bushel. "Now the secret is out," he concluded, "and I am heartily grateful to Warren, that is if Marcia consents to forgive it. Of course what I long for is to have her always beside me, shoulder to shoulder. When a man's heart is in the thing he is too given up to the idea of it, too suffused with it, too steeped in it, to experience anything but the desperation of his longing to realize it. But a woman is not that weak-minded sort of being. She puts in a plea for her youth, for her not having got over the surprise of it. Still, although she is blushing from head to foot, she admits that there is some truth

about the wonderful fiction of our being engaged to each other, and she thanks you all for your good wishes."

Gradually, with his warm firm clasp upon my shoulder I grew tranquillized. I could trust Paul. He had risen to the occasion. Soft clappings of the hands resounded from the whole circle. Everybody was talking at once, the meal was ending: nobody stayed at table, but one and all seemed to be crowding about me. Paul stayed close. Once or twice he said to me encouragingly,

"We will see it through, and when it is through it is through."

It was he, not I, who answered all the questions.

"Of course you are surprised," he would say. "I am not so sure about what the women are saying, but I know that every man present thinks to himself, 'I'll be hanged if I can make out what she sees in him.'"

And then again: "It is just a whirl. We do not see it steadily and see it whole yet. We feel as if we were going round and round. But finally we may find a footing. It is wonderful, is n't it?"

This was to Jean, who came up with an air pensive and sweet.

"Marcia, why did n't you tell me?" she demanded with an air of perfect naïveté. "Don't you remember what I asked you, last night?

How long have you been engaged? I know it is impertinent to ask. But you might have told me. I knew that he was bound hand and foot," she added, with a little gesture towards Paul. "I knew that he had not an ounce of freedom left — it had changed him so horribly. There has been often of late a touch of weirdness about him; he gave me the creeps. It is a pleasure to look at him now. He looks so proud and happy. I suppose, Marcia, you will let us admire him even if we dare not fall in love with him. Good-by, Paul," she said, stretching out her hand, palm down, with the air of a Frenchwoman who expects her hand to be kissed, "we had our good time, had n't we? 'One crowded hour of glorious life.'"

Paul met her look, her badinage, even her extended hand, with absolute composure, raising the fragile fingers not quite to his lips. She turned to me.

"If I had done this to you," she said, "got engaged without saying a word about it, you would have thought it barbarous, hideous, nothing less than treachery."

"Well, forgive me, Jean, for not telling you," I answered. "I ask you to forgive me."

She suddenly flung her arms round my neck, and pulled my head down. For a moment it seemed as if she wanted to whisper in my ear, but she said nothing, just touched my cheek with her lips.

"Well, I must go upstairs," she said. "If we are to get off to-morrow we shall be up to our necks in packing."

That was Jean's last word.

It had all rushed past me like a wave, a wave drowning all effort at individual action or assertion. What Mr. Rose had said to me was, —

"Was it quite fair, fair to me?"

And Paul had answered for me, "Honestly, Felix, I don't think it was. But I could not afford to let her be any fairer to you."

Jack Bell had not spoken a word. Jem Nicoll had left Marshmallows that morning, but the thought of him reminded me that it was my duty now to tell Gay that I was to marry Paul.

It was a diminished party that gathered at breakfast time next day. Mr. Rose and Jack Bell had set off at dawn in their automobile, leaving their adieux. The Darcys had caught the seven o'clock train to town, having hastily decided to sail for Liverpool on the Cunarder, that day at noon, feeling sure of commanding two of the officers' rooms if all the other berths were taken.

By noon almost every one was gone. It was now a family party, and the Chesters had insisted that I was to stay over until Monday, and I had yielded, for what had happened had been incalculable.

"At least we can take comfort in being honest," was Paul's observation to me. "I am yours

and you are mine, and all the world may know it."

But it had come about in such a startling way that I did not yet feel the earth solid under my feet; the surprise, the éclat had been over-trying to me, and I wondered if Paul as well did not object.

"No. Except that Warren went to work rather too brutally, I am heartily glad to have every one know exactly where we stand. It amuses me to see Warren to-day," he went on. "He is like a cat who has been at the cream jug; he still licks his chops over the delicious experience."

Yes, it was our hour, Paul's and mine. Nobody attempted to talk to us, to try to amuse us, or to offer us entertainment. There was a sort of Sabbath hush over the place as we walked about and sat down together in the pleasant places. Gradually, in the sweetness of this quiet and security, I began to understand what had happened.

"Everybody gets out of the way to give us a chance. There's rather a charm about the naïveté of it all, don't you think," exclaimed Paul. "And it is certainly a blessed relief that we have been through the cyclone, and that it has blown over. Things are turning out just as I wanted them to turn out. But Brockway will have to look up another Corisande." He paused and looked at me. It was apparently just this flash of illumination that I had been waiting for.

"Jean will not take the part, then?"

"Definitely no. Her 'yes' might have been full of feminine fluctuations. She might have left herself a chance to change her mind. She has made her refusal decided."

"It is a great loss to you."

"Brockway always declared he did not trust her. He is far from being heartbroken. He knows these fine ladies; he has had enough of them and to spare, already. Nothing suits them; nothing can be good enough for them; dressing-rooms, green-rooms, everything needs to be made over. And if the play takes the road the manager must also run the stars in their courses, not to say the weather. He has wired me already to-day, 'We can get on. I have three Corisandes in my mind, and with plenty of rehearsing any one of them will do.'"

It almost seemed to me that Paul wore an air of relief, as if he had thrown off something irksome. Indeed, there were signs that some sharp tension which he had felt of late had relaxed. More than once when he spoke of Jean it was with a touch of defiance.

"Nothing would please me better than to have some one 'catch on' to the part and carry it off to everybody's admiration. I am tired of trying to keep her in good humor, of flattering her, of living up to her caprices! Now that she has really gone, I am ready, if necessary, to fling

the play after her and call 'quits.' Oh, Marcia, the comfort of being here with you!" He could not say enough of the pleasantness of the transition from the feverish worry of the play; of realizing that the best and worst had happened; that it was over, and we were sitting down here alone together. He said more than once that he had not done justice before to the bliss of being engaged. So far he had accepted the situation as a mere interval of purgatory before heaven should open. If we had lived without this little interval of being able to see each other constantly and composedly, indifferent to whoever might be watching us, like burglars who fear no cry of 'police' — something of deliciousness would not have been squeezed out of our orange. We were actually, according to Paul, getting acquainted for the first time. He studied my hands; compared them with his own, and decided that there was a family resemblance between them. He made discoveries about my eyes, my hair, and every fresh surprise that he penetrated made him, he declared, more and more in love with me. We talked quite soberly about the future. He said that with the play once going we ought to be able to marry at once. However, my side of the question had to be considered. There was the catalogue still unfinished, and half a dozen schemes of Miss Keogh's were still hanging fire.

"Oh, Miss Keogh has plenty of advisers and

helpers. She can marry Mr. Bickerdyke or Mr. Bevis, or both, and they can go on spending her fortune for her," said Paul.

The idea rather struck me. Such a marriage would be a resource; for the thought of Miss Keogh, left alone in the world, sometimes hung over me, stirring a conscientious feeling that I ought never to leave her.

"Don't let us wait until we are old," said Paul. "We need to be together, living, loving, making our fortune together. Why not make a fortune as a cook makes a pancake? Without you it might have been uphill work, but with you" —

While Paul talked, he would often spring up, with an air as if the whole thing were too vivid, too poignant; would walk away, and from that point of vantage survey me as he paced to and fro: then would come back again, with an air of just having found me out.

"You would n't believe the pleasure I am getting out of this," he said, more than once, "and Warren chuckles every time he sees me, and calls, 'Well, how are you getting on, old boy?' He is quite sure that he has played double sixes, and that without that particular chuck of the dice all this divine peace would not have come."

A secret sense of the truth of this passed through me with an electric thrill. What filled my heart was as much pain as pleasure. Was I

robbing Jean of a possible happiness? I did not wish to rob any one alive.

"That particular chuck of the dice did also for Felix Rose and Jack Bell, did n't it?" Paul said to me once. "I hope you do not feel lonely without your circle of admirers."

There had been nothing for me to miss in losing Felix Rose and Jack Bell out of the house-party, and I said so.

Paul meditated a moment.

"That old verse comes to my mind, —

> 'It is good to be merry and wise,
> It is good to be honest and true,
> It is well to be off with the old love
> Before you are on with the new.'"

His manner suggested some particular meaning behind the well-worn words.

"Marcia, I may as well tell you," he went on, with suppressed vehemence, "that all through Friday Jean held on to me like a lost soul. On the one hand she had Brockway's offer, which had flattered her tremendously, and the idea of her success on the stage took hold of her with a powerful fascination. Then, on the other hand, there was the sure thing of the Darcys' money and prestige. They could offer her every sort of social opportunity. She seemed to have hung both in the scale, and they exactly balanced. What she wanted me to do was to throw in my own personal weight. I saw you go off with that

motoring party, and I was ready to grind my teeth, but I had to sit as if chained to the bench under the magnolia trees, and hear her pour forth eloquent long monologues. It all came out, her longing for life, for emotion, for art, for applause, for anything that filled up the vacuum. She wanted everything, and wanted it at once, and I had somehow to meet her. With the feeling that everything concerning the play was at stake, I had, whether I had everything she wanted or not, to promise everything, — to tell her to stay and act, to work *avec la nature*, which you know is a phrase of hers. She confessed herself drawn to the stage with a curious infatuation; declared that her whole thirst for life centred there, that to live without the swift transitions of feeling, the climax of emotion, the enthusiasm of the experience, made existence not worth having. Yet at the same time" — So far Paul had spoken with a degree of angry vehemence. Now he paused for a moment before he went on. "At the same time she more than half looks down on the stage as a vocation. She wants everything. She is up to all points of the game."

I did not quite understand. I was not sure that I wished quite to understand.

"She knew her power, — in fact overestimated it. She thought she was Corisande, not the mere machine set going, but the conception

itself, that penetrated, warmed, and set aglow, — in fact that without her the play could not exist."

His face flashed out of cloud as he said this. He had jumped up nervously between each of these statements, and had walked, first one way and then the other. Now he came back, sat down by me, and said softly, —

"Warren kept his eyes on us. Twice that afternoon he came up, feigning a belief that it was Grace who was with me. Again he pretended to be looking for a book that he might have left on the table near us. When finally Miss Darcy went into the house to dress for dinner, and I was left to follow, I found Warren lying in wait for me. As I entered the hall he beckoned, led me into the book-room, shut the door, and said, 'Are you or are you not engaged to Miss Dundas?' I was silent a moment, half indignant, perhaps, at his tone, which suggested a highwayman's 'stand and deliver.' He asked again, this time quite angrily, 'Are you or are you not engaged to Miss Dundas?' 'I certainly am,' I replied. 'You don't wish to deny it?' 'I would deny any fact of my life sooner,' was my answer. And so Warren spoke out at dinner."

CHAPTER XVII

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE

The summer passed swiftly. I had been given a fresh impulse, and I settled down to my work with inspiration. Miss Keogh's ideas and theories were at last taking shape. Mr. Bickerdyke had been buying a piece of land for her which was to be laid out for a village, and plans for small houses and also for a large Settlement House were now one of the subjects under discussion. But our chief present activities concerned a children's summer home on Long Island Sound. Mr. Bevis and his sister had long been managers of this charity, and now, under Miss Keogh's auspices, the scope of the enterprise had been doubled, almost trebled.

The idea sometimes flashed across my mind that there existed some slight degree of rivalry between Mr. Bickerdyke and Mr. Bevis: that each was beginning to be a little insistent on making his own side felt. Mr. Bevis, at any rate, had become almost indispensable to Miss Keogh. He went about with her, to use his own expression, "into the highways and byways." Miss Keogh's wish was always to get outside of what

was the stereotyped, the regular groove, and she was anxious to hunt up people whose claims to charity might have been overlooked. Mr. Bevis liked to put into these expeditions all his fun and whimsicality. He would suggest gravely to Miss Keogh that they should walk about like sandwich-men, placarded back and front, WHO WILL COME TO THE COUNTRY FOR A FORTNIGHT? He would explain to her, with almost touching lucidity, his own preferences in the matter of paupers. He liked to pretend that certain people ought not to be helped, declaring they could not possibly be so ugly, so disagreeable to every sense unless they enjoyed it. He liked to make an instance of one of his experiences with Miss Keogh; and to tell how when she was trying to induce some poor people to move into better quarters she had been combated by the father of the family, who declared his preference for the old familiar place.

"But it smells so badly," argued Miss Keogh. "You yourself can smell it. Is that the way dwelling rooms ought to smell?" Whereupon the man conscientiously sniffed about, then turning to the benefactress, answered, —

"No, it don't smell *goot;* but it is warm weather, and everything smells in warm weather. I smell, my wife smells, everybody smells."

Then Mr. Bevis would pretend that no one ought to wish to help people whose personal

tastes and qualities displeased them, and would advise Miss Keogh always to shut her eyes when she came upon people she did not like, people with bad complexions, people with large noses and ears, or who wore gaudy clothes. He said that such people were already happy, they needed no help, they enjoyed their big noses and ears and their pink and red frocks and their dirt and their smells. It was not worth while to throw pearls before them.

Miss Keogh would listen with a quiet, grave air, then would answer with the utmost seriousness, —

"I wish to help people. If they do not understand their deprivations in the way of pure air and cleanliness, it shows that all the more they require my help."

Mr. Bevis would argue in all sorts of ways. Sometimes in favor of leaving people to suffer and to struggle, because in no other way could the necessity of a pitying Saviour be brought so near. I understood Mr. Bevis very well, and I was sure that Miss Keogh must also understand that much of his paradoxical way of looking at things came from his over-acute consciousness of the real misery they had to encounter as they went about day by day. What staggered him most, he declared, was the disgusting inefficiency of men and women in worthy directions, compared with their power of doing mischief in other

directions, particularly in the way of perpetuating themselves by giving life to myriads of human beings to whom they furnished nothing but a disgraceful example.

Mr. Bickerdyke had quite another point of view, a counter set of axioms. He did not believe that pauperism and crime were necessarily perpetuated. His creed was that, with a little help of the right sort, there was a constant, inevitable revolt against the worst conditions of life, and that the force which made the world go round was a desire for light, for order; to be something better; and to attain to something better.

Miss Keogh would listen to one or the other of her advisers without gravitating to either extreme of optimism or of pessimism. She had all this money to spend, and she simply wished to spend it in the best way. The money existed, the poor people existed, how to make the one answer the necessities of the other was a matter for thought. Now and then when she had some experience which encouraged her, her face would show it in an uplifted look, as if she had found some great opportunity; but as a rule she was always quiet, timid, and uncertain. Remembering Paul's suggestion that she should be married off to Mr. Bevis or Mr. Bickerdyke, I could not help speculating a little as to her possible preference. If Mr. Bevis sometimes startled her with his whims and nonsensical paradoxes, they en-

tertained her, nevertheless, and often enlarged her view. Mr. Bickerdyke was more judicial. He preached little sermons to her, sometimes, indeed, laid down the law hard and fast. I told Miss Keogh one day about Queen Victoria's having said that when Mr. Gladstone talked to her she felt as if he were lecturing her personally. Miss Keogh was interested and answered with a lightening of aspect, that Mr. Bickerdyke, as well as Mr. Gladstone, could have told a queen how to do her duty. This helped me to feel tolerably certain that it was Mr. Bevis; that it could not possibly be Mr. Bickerdyke.

I saw Paul occasionally; if I did not see him constantly I knew of his preoccupation with the play, and the play counted for too much in his life at present for me to be jealous of it. I heard from him every day, and thus, keeping closely in touch, felt as if I were going with him every step of the way. At first both he and Mr. Brockway believed they had succeeded very well in allotting the characters. The part of Corisande was originally given to an English actress by the name of Agnes Byington. Then, when they decided that she did not come up to the necessities of the rôle, they had settled down upon a certain Julie L'Estrange, who had made a hit in some minor theatre the winter before, and who, Paul declared, showed a taste, a skill, a discretion, indeed an art, which gave them high hopes. She

was not unlike Jean Darcy in appearance, Paul told me. And, like Jean, she seemed to have it in her to become a conscientious student, wished to know not only how everything ought to be done, but why it ought to be done. He had set himself the task of teaching her how to read the part, making her learn the intonation of the words as much as the words themselves, giving to each its just note, its right accent, its exact emphasis; making her feel the capacity for meaning which lay not only in each sentence, but in each word in the sentence. With such efforts his long, intimate coaching of Jean had made him familiar, and this Julie too, was an ambitious girl who longed to become a great actress. She had already played the part of Juliet, also of Ibsen's Nora. Yes, Paul told me, that as time went on he felt more and more certain that she had the requisite stuff in her.

As for Jean Darcy, arriving in London just at the height of the season, she had had for a few weeks a very brilliant experience. Later, with Mr. and Mrs. Darcy, she had gone on a round of visits to various country houses in England and Scotland. Then, at the beginning of cool weather, she, with her parents, was to set out for Japan, spending part of the winter in India. All these details were in the morning and evening papers, with portraits of Miss Jean Darcy in motor cars, on horseback, in golf and shooting dress, in din-

ner dress. I needed to ask no questions nor need I feel that Jean was wasting her life. She seemed, indeed, with all these facts, hints, suggestions, sidelights illustrating her present career, to be very vividly alive. Except in the way of comparing Jean with Miss L'Estrange, Paul had hardly once alluded to her. Something of incredible wistfulness, a sense at times of acute pain which for a while had haunted me whenever I had thought of Jean, began to be lulled, — became something almost to smile at as I looked at her pictures set against every sort of brilliant background. I was, indeed, too much absorbed in my own work to brood too much. Miss Keogh needed me at every step. More and more as the summer went on, the ugliness, the squalidness, the horror of the lives people were compelled to go on living in the crowded parts of the city made her long to help. She said that the very whiff of the air they had to breathe sickened her; that the pale glare in the faces of the men, women, and children whom she met in certain streets made her feel as if it were their daily fate to be caught up and carried on in a dizzy whirl, as if bound to a wheel. With such sights under her pitying eyes, it was impossible for any one to live softly, to eat delicately, to sleep peacefully, while these miserable human beings were left to suffer. It troubled her, too, this ardent benefactress, that in her deepest soundings into the physical misery

of the poor people she longed to help the question of their souls could not enter at all. All she was in haste to do at present was to quench their thirst, try to keep them cool, offer them something that through the long day and night could in some poor way answer the yearning of mind and body for refreshment. The immensity of her doubt as to her right to use her money except for those who needed it, at last met the widest possible outlet. All that long hot summer she did nothing but give.

I sometimes thought that she was all the more in haste to fling away her possessions on account of my engagement to Paul. Of course Mr. Bevis knew and Mr. Bickerdyke knew, — indeed, all the world who cared could not help knowing that Paul and I were to be married when the time came. Mr. Bickerdyke had given his approval, *upon the whole;* any possible disapproval coming from Paul's interest in the drama. Mr. Bickerdyke affirmed that no man could serve two masters, could acknowledge a higher and a lower law; still, there had been, he confessed, good plays written, plays with a good moral. As for Mr. Bevis, he confounded Paul Chauncey up and down.

"He may be all well enough, Marcia, but he is n't good enough for you. No man in the world is good enough for you except myself."

And when he offered his congratulations to

Paul he told him frankly that he considered him an intruder, an interloper; that he, Mr. Bevis, had been only waiting for the right moment to come forward himself.

Miss Keogh said to me one day, —

"I hope it will not be for a long time yet, Marcia."

I told her that the catalogue had to be finished first, that nothing would be done hastily.

"It frightens me to think of being left alone," she said. And something in her look, tender, clinging, intimate, quite touched my heart.

From the first moment, she went on, she had trusted me implicitly. Nobody could ever take my place.

"Only one person," I ventured.

She looked at me, startled and curious.

"Dear Miss Keogh," I said, "why should n't you marry?" It was as if I had outraged something sacred. She not only colored visibly, but I could see that her whole, intense little physical being flamed up with indignation at my suspicion that such an incredible proposition could be harbored in her mind.

"How can you say such a thing?" she faltered.

"But it seems to me very natural," I said. "I am to marry somebody whom I love and who loves me, and with such happiness before me, I hate to think of leaving you alone. I long to have you equally happy."

All her feeling was focused in the look out of her frightened eyes, and in the little red spots that burned on each cheek.

"I cannot think," — she murmured ineffectually, then her thought died away.

"Do you mean you cannot think whom I wish you to marry?" I asked archly. "I could not have any possible doubt on that subject." Again something in her look seemed to demand an answer.

"It is somebody who comes almost every day," I said.

At first she looked at me long and steadily, then she said with a new sort of severity, —

"How can you possibly think of such a thing?"

Indeed, I did feel that I had thought of something which only a miracle could bring about. Still, I more and more perceived in Miss Keogh a quickened perception in certain ways; little signs indicating that something hitherto kept down, muffled, forbidden, belonged to her as a woman nevertheless, and was beginning to assert itself.

"She has consented to have two rather pretty gowns," I once told Paul, under my breath, "and I am beginning to think that she will" —

"Marry Bickerdyke?" he suggested as I left the sentence unfinished.

"Oh, not Mr. Bickerdyke — Mr. Bevis," I corrected. "I could not possibly have any doubt on

that subject. I should love to marry Mr. Bevis myself, but Mr. Bickerdyke is quite out of the question."

Paul laughed and granted that I probably understood the subject better than he could, so it was decided between us that Miss Keogh was to marry Mr. Bevis.

CHAPTER XVIII

STEEPED ME IN POVERTY TO THE VERY LIPS

THE play, which had practically been under rehearsal ever since early in July, was to be brought out in a New England city on the twenty-fifth of September; then, after this experiment had been well tried, would come to New York in November. It had been the great, the all overshadowing event of the future. Now, as the time drew near, and one looked into the face of the almost accomplished fact, it seemed somehow to dwindle. Between being pleased with the way things are going and believing that ultimately they will take exactly the right turn; then, with the end in sight, feeling with satisfaction that the result is certain, impregnable, irresistible, there must always yawn a gulf not invariably to be taken with a flying leap.

Paul had seemed all through the summer to be ardently hopeful, more than ardently hopeful, sure. Now he began to take another tone. His belief in his own success apparently wavered. He began to say that if the play fell short of making the greatest possible hit he should hate it. What he wanted evidently was not only to

have his cup full, but to have it brim over. When he came to see me one Sunday afternoon, late in August, he refused at first to say anything about how the play was going; declared that he only longed to be free even of the thought of it, for an hour or two. He was so tired of mediocrities and failures, he said, and felt ready to fling the whole enterprise to the four winds of heaven. In every other art, he went on to observe, — poetry, sculpture, painting, novel-writing, — the artist may strike his blow and make his power directly felt; his work is addressed to the brain, eyes, or ears of his audience. Not so with the play-writer, who shapes his figures after his own ideals, but cannot wind up the manikins to give them life; miserable puppets that they are, they persist in dancing to another string altogether. No, the dramatist is at the mercy of every miserable accident, every sort of little irony of fate.

This gust of wrath might be the mere outbreak of a petulant mood or it might be knit to some fact that stood for the success or failure of the play; so I listened with close sympathy. I was ready to be bitterly sorry for Paul. What the play had originally meant to me had long since vanished almost out of sight and even memory. What it stood for now was something I longed to have successful, in order that Paul might have the experience he seemed to crave more than anything else in life. To-day, although he

pretended to dismiss the subject to the limbo of forgotten things, I knew that his thoughts were full of it, and demanded some expression. Accordingly I remarked that I was afraid that Miss L'Estrange began to be disappointing.

"*Begins* to be disappointing!" he burst out; then, calming down, he went on to explain that up to a certain point a good many artists might do fairly well; then came the test, and the one who had genius expanded while the other flattened out. Miss L'Estrange had worked so well under suggestion he had felt sure that she had the making of a real actress in her. Then the dominant self, elusive to direction, began to assert itself. She lacked perception of the real dramatic quality of her own part. Having said so much, with considerable temper, Paul put on a bland face.

"However, I don't consider it absolutely hopeless," he continued. "She may still catch on. Brockway says there is often a sort of inspiration in the final wind-up of rehearsals. Sometimes like magic just the very thing you ask for has grown and blossomed in one night. But it would be a distinct pity if Miss L'Estrange were to stop short of the essential quality which makes Corisande."

"Jean had it," I said. "And seeing Jean as Corisande has spoiled you for any other actress."

He corrected me.

"For any lesser actress. For a while Miss L'Estrange made an astonishing advance. I fully expected she would finally strike the true keynote of the piece."

It was a sultry, late summer afternoon. All day the skies had been murky and the air oppressive. Now, as we sat together in the library, we could hear low mutterings of thunder. Rising, looking out, and pushing back the curtains, I could see that half the sky was covered with bluish black masses of cloud which hung like a canopy over the whole west, and were rising rapidly to the zenith, while from their turbulent folds there now began to dart, every other moment, a dazzling line of light.

"I hope there will be a shower," remarked Paul. "It may help to take the weight off our souls. Something has been sitting on mine for a week, gibbering at me like a nightmare."

Still he did not seem to be in an active mood of depression or apprehension over the possible failure of the play; simply to desire to feel irresponsible, to wash his hands of it. Nevertheless I understood very well the bitter disappointment of having the much-talked-of work go under, and, in case of disaster being obliged to submit it to the logic of naked, blunt, merciless newspaper criticism, an experience against which his pride and taste alike recoiled.

"It ought not to fail," I ventured. "In June,

everybody said it was certain to make a furore. There must be some way of having it come out right."

"Miss L'Estrange may catch on. It is not worth while to consider her a perfectly hopeless case," said Paul.

"You need Jean," I exclaimed, with conviction. "Jean, and Jean only, can carry it off to please you."

These words seemed to burst from me unbidden, inspired by the vision of Jean as Corisande, which for the moment rose close, real, and vividly alive.

To Paul it must have been as close, as real, as vividly alive, for he answered, on the instant,—

"No doubt she longs to be Corisande quite as much as we long to have her; she has been eagerly waiting to hear that we cannot possibly get on without her."

This dropped from him with a little laugh, half of amusement, half of irritation.

"Do you know anything about her? Have you heard from her? Has she written to you?"

"Yes," he made answer to my rapid questions, in the quietest voice.

The room had grown so dark I could no longer distinguish his features. The great curtain of cloud had by this time dropped almost to the eastern horizon. The lightning flashes grew more vivid, and the thunder, instead of answer-

ing them slowly and reluctantly, sounded almost overhead. Paul had waited a moment, but now went on, —

"She has been dying of curiosity about the play. You know that she is the most inquisitive creature alive. She always said she should be ready to poison anybody who promised to equal her in the part. Brockway took pains to send her a whole pile of clippings about our expecting great things of Miss L'Estrange."

"I can fancy Jean's being eager to come back and play Corisande herself."

"So can I."

"You had better cable to her to come."

"Oh, we have done so," said Paul easily. "Not that it is a case of life or death yet, but we are getting into a rage with Miss L'Estrange. She begins to kick. Most of these actresses are vain mulish creatures, not to be stirred out of their disgusting self-satisfaction."

The rain had come, at first with a far-off note, that sounded like the distant tread of an advancing army, then with a sharp patter near at hand, and finally with the roar of a steadily descending torrent. Paul's definite statement that they had already acted upon what I had thrown out as a fantastic suggestion had seemed to plant a ghost in the room, a ghost that startled, threatened, seemed to stand between me and Paul, separating us. His first reluctance to say

a word about the play took on a different aspect. I had supposed that Paul and Jean were as wide asunder as the salt estranging seas could make them. But here she was again, and it was a palpable demonstration of her power over Paul or of his power over her. Which it was I did not attempt to define. What I experienced was an arresting sense that I must not let myself hate the thought of Jean's coming back. I saw instantly that what was happening was inevitable. Jean loved to do everything picturesque, and this triumphant sequence of events would attract her irresistibly. She had flung herself into a different life which had carried her on the very crest of the wave; by this time she would be ready for another sort of excitement. She always tired of the good, the admirable Darcys, always so anxious to keep her in the straight, well-lighted road they loved. Yes, Jean would come back and take the part. Her character, her temperament, her eager ambition made the conclusion irresistible.

The storm was now at its height. At first, through the obscure twilight, I had been able to make out Paul's tall figure, easy and debonair, in his light summer clothes, stretched along the curves of the Spanish chair. Now, even this faint outline was swallowed up in the blackness which took possession of everything. I could see nothing, I was deafened by the sound of the

beat of the rain on the roof where the volume of water bursting from the tin spouts, and overflowing the eaves, was driven by the wind and set swirling in all directions. The storm took voice like a creature in pain, uttered moans, complaints, which from time to time rose into shrieks. I, too, had somehow a soreness of feeling, a personal sense of loss. I felt as if I were separated from all things; as if the happy busy world had broken itself from me, gone on and left me in this thick darkness. Suddenly, into this hideous nightmare of feeling came a sudden illuminating flash of lightning. It made the whole room clear as noonday. But what startled me most sensibly was that it showed me Paul, who had risen and was coming toward me, holding out both arms. Then when I stretched out my hand it met his, and while the thunder answered the lightning, pealing crash after crash, he was sitting beside me holding me close to him.

It answered a need of my heart that he had come to me at that moment. I did not try to define just what half-doubt in my mind had suddenly grown to full size and shaken my belief in Paul. Now it haunted me no longer. Here he was and there could be nothing hidden, no treachery, no disloyalty, nothing between us but tenderness and close comradeship. No question was necessary, no criticism, no analysis. Indeed, in that wild rapture of feeling it seemed

as if it had needed just that moment of dreadful night to show us that though the heavens thundered, and the earth rocked, nothing but death could part Paul and me.

It was but a moment, and then it had passed. Miss Keogh had stolen in, frightened and tremulous, and begged to stay with us. I turned up the electric lights, and she sat down between us on the sofa. She was, she confessed, terribly afraid of thunder and lightning, and could not help feeling that they bore to her a personal message of the uncertainty of life, the certainty of death, the dangers of what came after death. So I held her hand and we talked, trying to cheer away her doubt and despondency, and our little episode, which had for a moment seemed so real and permanent a part of our consciousness, was something only for me to remember with a certain clutch at my heart. The shower continued for hours. Paul stayed over the evening meal, but at last went away by starlight. I loitered on the steps, bidding him good-night, for there was a delicious coolness in the outside air, something even of a crisp autumn-like touch in the fresh wind which was stirring.

I had lived down my jealous impulse, and, in glad confidence, I told Paul that I felt sure that Jean would come and save the play. Certain things were ordained from the beginning, and Jean's playing Corisande was one of them.

"I hate it all," said Paul. "At this moment I hate everything that belongs to that sordid deteriorating damnable side of life. All this evening, Marcia, I have been thinking what it might be for you and me to live far away from New York, free from everything that I know and loathe here. I should like always, as now, to have you close beside me, with this cool wind in our faces. If I could have my wish at this moment I should be mounted on one good horse, and you on another, and we would ride, ride together, forever ride, straight into the wide West where the wind comes from."

I laughed.

"But what would become of the play?"

"Let the play go. You are what I want, and I ask for nothing else. I hate this clamor, this confusion, this grind."

However, he had to go. He took out his cigarette case, lighted one, and I watched him walk down the street.

I could well understand his capricious preoccupation with the play which, while it engrossed and promised, also mocked and deluded. Also, I felt the imperious logic of the situation. Indeed, I admired Paul for the self-command he had displayed all through this quiet evening. He had told Miss Keogh a good deal about the practical workings of the enterprise of putting a new piece on the boards. He had given not a few

amusing anecdotes. The play was for the moment the great reality of his life: everything else was mirage.

Then followed a whole month when every day, every hour of the day, was making a difference in my life. It is no easy matter to give a clear record here of what was fact and what was presentiment.

I had been completely isolated from all knowledge of what was going on until, on the eighth of September, Paul sent me just these three lines: "Miss Jean Darcy got in yesterday afternoon. We shall now have to see if it is worth the price."

The daily papers had caught on to the situation. It was everywhere announced that Miss Darcy, hitherto known as an accomplished actress in private theatricals, had given up her trip round the world to come back and take the leading part in Paul Chauncey's new play. I had at once written with cordiality and sympathy regarding Jean. I had even sent a message to her. At first I needed no explanation why I did not hear from Paul again. I understood that the very fact of Jean's arriving at this eleventh hour must necessitate fresh activities in every direction. She would never be satisfied until the entire *dramatis personae* answered her every requirement, until the setting of every scene should be penetrated with her personality and her idea. When a week

had passed, I said to myself that the twenty-fifth was now so near I ought not to count on hearing until after the first night.

Still, just to answer the passionate voice which rose within, saying that Paul might send one word, simply to tell me what was happening, I wrote again and asked him to wire and tell me if events were finally taking shape in the way he desired. That was on a Wednesday. All day Thursday I expected to receive a telegram, but it did not come, nor even on Friday. When on Saturday I had not heard, the silence which had at first been strange, inexplicable, incredible, seemed logically to resolve itself into its own answer. Evidently Paul had not written me or wired because he intended to come to see me on Sunday. I felt so sure of seeing him on that day that I dressed for him, arranged flowers, asked for a certain course at dinner to please him. It was a September day of soft, sleepy sunshine. He did not come, nor did I hear from him on the Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday. From day to day some slight change of mental attitude made itself felt and seemed to prepare me for certain catastrophe. These differences which altered belief and hope into doubt and suspicion were too elusive to be easily defined. I was ready to forgive, to excuse, to understand. I was ready to be splendidly lavish. A score, a hundred of little defeats, little disappointments, fits of feel-

ing first hot and then cold, shift one's bearings; an aggregation of tiny atoms of contrary evidence change the scale wherein we weigh our most fixed ideas. Still, so far everything was a mere breath, a mere pin's point. If a cloud seemed to hang between me and Paul, a cloud like a high wall, it might be only because we were separated. I knew only one thing at present,—that Jean was with Paul. And if Jean were with Paul I knew that she would imperiously claim his time, his attention, his allegiance. I could imagine her, vivid, provocative, enchanting; talking, discussing, challenging. Impossible but that when he depended on her for the satisfaction of his hopes and ambitions he should be wholly swayed by her. That he found in her at this moment the essential quality which he did not find in me was definitely clear. She belonged to his life, while I was outside it altogether. She was in the secret of his innermost consciousness, while I could only think of him and of her with feelings I dared not let myself harbor. She was close to him at this moment. I was a stranger. All these things I had to accept the consciousness of through these days of pain. But at the same time I told myself that all this strange interval might prove to be something easily accounted for; the mere result of the passing fever of occupation and expectation, and that one moment of clear understanding would alter the value of everything.

But, as if the truth told in these detached fragments, each one fitting into the failure of my day's hope, were not enough, I had the whole fabric at last from Paul himself. This is what he wrote to me:—

"Marcia, you are not only the sweetest woman on earth, but the most magnanimous. You will have believed in me as long as you could, but by this time you will have understood that everything between us is at an end. Friends, comrades, we were once and found it almost enough. Dare I ask you to be my friend, my comrade, still? I have made many an effort to write before, but I have torn up letter after letter. I have tried to go to see you, but all in vain. I might tell you that if you feel contempt you can have no more contempt for me than I have for myself. But it is all of no use. This had to come. I know that you will understand;—that perhaps you are even already reconciled;—that you surrender everything;—that you forgive everything and hope for me. Paul."

Perhaps I sat still for an hour after I read this. What I had experienced had been a chill, a shudder. After a time the glow of feeling returned. He was right; Heaven knows that I did understand. I met him squarely. I told him that I was reconciled; that I surrendered; that I forgave everything, and hoped for his having every success that life could bring him.

So much a girl can do easily under the first urgency of outraged pride. He asked for his freedom, and I was glad to give it. He called me magnanimous, and it was a challenge. I could be magnanimous. I seemed to see the whole story under a fresh illumination. I went back to my first impression that Paul and Jean were close friends, probably lovers. I recalled how absolutely open and simple, direct and unhesitating, had been her confession that she cared for Paul. Let me sum it all up in one word, they loved each other; they were essential to each other. I did not for the moment ask myself, where was I? It did not seem to be necessary. This sensation that the world with its warmth and vitality had gone on and left me detached and isolated, in a void of chilly space, I had experienced before. Then it had been answered by something close, living, something ardently responsive. All the same it had been the forerunner of this experience to come. Nevertheless, I was sure that I should find composure presently. All the better for the touch of fatalism in my nature I should face the fact that I was left alone. At a dreadful loss I had played my game with destiny; juggling with what did not belong to me. I had not to struggle against any sense of injustice. I had always felt the gods gave me nothing without my paying down the price for it.

There was nothing to cry aloud about; there

was nothing even to put in one's prayers and beg to be forgiven for, and made to forgive; there was only something to accept, dismiss, and forget. If only the others could accept, dismiss, and forget! If I need not see shocked sensibilities in Miss Keogh's face; a warm indignation in Mr. Bickerdyke's, and in Mr. Bevis's a perfect passion of sympathy, which constantly not only brought to my mind the sense that I was sorely wounded, but seemed to twist the knife in the wound. I could not bear that people should pity me. I did not wish to have it considered that Paul had committed an irredeemable offense. If at first I lacked a motive for going on, a rule of life to live by, I soon felt that it lay in my showing all the world that I experienced no indignation, no scorn; that I did not suffer; that everything between Paul and me had been a mistake, and that I willingly accepted the fact that we were parted asunder.

I was in this mood when Grace Chester came to see me. I was doing some careful work on the typewriting machine, copying names and dates for the catalogue. I had taken up this occupation because I could constantly verify the letters and figures by the copy. It was something tangible on which I could concentrate my mind. Without it, sometimes, nowadays my thoughts seemed to drop away into a gulf of vacancy. I fancy that Grace had stood for some minutes

watching me before I turned and saw her. When I did look up, and made an effort to greet her, the moment our eyes met she burst into uncontrollable weeping, fell on her knees before me, and hid her face in my lap.

"What can I say?" she faltered, after a time.

"What is there to say?" I asked. "Have you come to tell me that Paul and Jean are married?"

"Yes." She shuddered from head to foot as she uttered this decisive word. Then lifting her head she seemed to study my face.

I had not been certain. I had caught a glimpse of pictures and of names in the papers. I knew that the play had been carried by Jean's sheer genius to a climax of triumphant success. I could not tell whether or no Paul and Jean were actually married. Feeling for so long the pressure of some obscure crisis in which I was concerned, but of whose definite workings I was ignorant, I had suffered chiefly from an impatience to know the worst that was to come, and have it over. Now that Jean was Mrs. Paul Chauncey I saw things more clearly.

"He must have written to you," gasped Grace. "Did he not explain?"

"Explain? What was there to explain?"

She began to pour out broken, disconnected sentences, as if urged by a passion of indignation.

"If ever a man needed to explain himself it was Paul! There are always two sides to him, the safe side and the dangerous side. He was too sure of himself, he never understood himself. All he will tell me now is, that this thing had to come, that it was no sort of use to try to fight against it. He says he had tried to make a fight but was compelled to lay down his arms. He had to sacrifice something, somebody; he could not sacrifice Jean. His whole future depended on her; she was necessary to the play. Indeed, Marcia, that play had grown to be like a devouring dragon,—it has swallowed up everything. He loved you, Marcia, he did love you! But all the time something in Jean held him. Between them was some mysterious affinity. I never understood what it was. How do you think I feel? And Warren! He has longed to come to you, but says he dares not look you in the face. We are both of us so crushed, so humiliated, so unhappy! What we feel is that Paul has wasted the most precious thing in the world."

Again she lifted her head and stared hard at me, her own face flushed and convulsed with her agitation.

"Speak," she said. "Say something."

"I have nothing to say," I answered quietly.

"Is it killing you? Has it broken your heart?"

"Broken my heart? Killed me? Why, I told

Paul that if he wished to be free, I was glad to have him free as air."

"Free? He was tied hand and foot. Never was there such an enslavement. Whether Jean loves him or just loves her power over him I cannot pretend to say, but she holds him in a vise. He cannot escape her. She knows, she has always known, just how to cast a spell over him. There are some women who know how to take hold of a man, body and soul alike; honor, duty, ambition, career, are nothing when they stand in the way." Grace paused, then burst out abruptly: "I hope you despise him, Marcia; I hope you are saying to yourself, 'He is, after all, a poor creature.'"

"I have no wish to despise him. I have always wanted the best possible thing to happen to Paul. If this is the best possible thing I am honestly glad. All I ask is that everybody will forget that any particular tie between us ever existed."

"No wonder you wish to have so much futile spending of noble belief forgotten." She had attained some degree of composure. "What Warren feels," she now went on, "is that he cannot forgive himself for parading the news of the engagement before everybody we know. But he hated the girl, he saw that she was dangerous. He believed that he was saving Paul. But he thinks now, and so do I, that he precipitated the whole tragedy, for so we call it. She is an

unscrupulous woman. He put her in a rage, and she came back in a mood to wreak her vengeance on us all."

Grace asserted this with a primitive sincerity of conviction. There are feelings and impressions whose essential force lies in their being unuttered, incommunicable. Even if I had read this meaning into the story I hated to have the dubious thing made so plain. Grace burst into wild tears again.

"You are splendidly proud, Marcia, but don't try to be too cold, too proud. I wish you would storm out at Paul, at Warren, at me. I could bear anything better than to have you sit looking at me with that dreadful composure."

"Let me be composed. Let it all pass. Things do pass."

"But if you loved Paul as I thought you loved him" —

"If I loved Paul!"— I repeated, and tried to smile. But I was afraid of saying anything more, lest my feelings should betray me, break through as a smouldering fire breaks through a crust of ashes, so I said again,—

"Let it pass; all things do pass."

Grace had had her own share of the trouble to bear. Warren was so fiercely indignant at Paul that he had been inclined to forbid his wife's having any further intercourse with her brother. Then, besides her own private grief, there was the

mortification of having to meet people's questions; of making some sort of explanation. On the way here to-day she had met Felix Rose, who had seemed to be half beside himself. After all, there was something for me to be grateful for; that I had work to do, and need not face the world.

CHAPTER XIX

"GRANT ME, YE GODS, WHAT IS MY DUE"

I HAD expected, after a few days, to be able to sit down and do my work in the usual way. But nothing is so strange as the strangeness of familiar things when the heart has gone out of them. I discovered now that there was a new heaven and a new earth, I might even say a new hell to be taken into account.

"Give me a little time," I said to myself, as if pleading with an overseer who urged me with a whip, "just a little time and I shall get used to it. I intend to be quite happy and useful presently, but first this has to be lived through." I had indeed to make one moan; to cry as the fledgeling cries when it falls from the warm nest; feeling, instead of the mother's tender breast, the dreary desolation, the edge of the sharp stone. While I was still fighting against the bitterness of this conclusion, Gaynor Lee came to see me, walking straight into the library one evening.

"I was very much startled," he began at once, "at seeing in the paper that Paul Chauncey was married to Jean Darcy. I suppose it must be

true, for just one look at your face tells me that you are going through some terrible misery."

"It is true. But don't talk about it, Gay. I do not ask any one to pity me."

"I did not come because I pity you," said Gay. "If Chauncey were worth pity I might pity him. I had to come. Although I know how brave you are, I know that there are moments when even the bravest and proudest, even you, Marcia, may like to see a familiar face. Besides," here something in Gay's gesture, keen and swift, startled me like the drawing of a naked sword, "you have neither father nor brother" —

"Oh, no knight errantry on my behalf, please, Gay," I said, flinging out my hand and clasping his. "Don't imagine there are any wrongs of mine to be redressed. Paul and Jean had known each other a long time. All this came about quite naturally; anything else would have been a mistake."

He had sat down opposite me, and now, leaning forward, he spoke in a low voice:—

"I went to see the play." Then, when I made no answer, he continued: "I recognized the plot instantly. Don't you remember? You told me the story a year ago in Swallowfield. You said it was one of the first novels you meant to write."

"And so you remembered it?"

"As if I could have forgotten it! I remembered, too, that when I was here last spring you

were helping Chauncey about some work. It was your play, Marcia."

Gay's words brought up a clear picture. I seemed once more to face the darkness; to realize that the incredible had happened; that Paul and I had once been so close together, and that now the great divide had come. But Gay was so palpable, so near, so kind, it made me less desolate.

"Don't think he asked me to help him," I said.

"Of course you loved to help him. From the first moment I understood that he was to you like none else. He seemed to bring something into your life that you had always needed, a strength, an efficacy not his own. He bore the names you loved, he had the prestige of the family connection. Then, too, he was handsomer than others, cleverer, better bred; and from the start he was drawn to you, and you were just as powerfully drawn to him."

"It was partly the kinship," I returned. "I did feel glad and proud that I had somebody who belonged to me. I had never once thought of being in love with Paul, Gay, until he asked me to marry him."

Gay's clasp on my hand was so warm and friendly, and his face so clear and kind, it was easy enough to go on.

"I ask myself now," I said, "if the way I wrote the play made him see too clearly that I longed

to do something for him. At the time, the matter was quite simple, I just felt the impulse, and threw myself into the task." I told Gay how it had been done; how I had given Paul the story, and how that night when I was at the opera the music had seemed to round out the drama, making all the action, the feeling, even the dialogue take form before my mind like a real thing. At first it had been only a flash of insight, a leap of the imagination; then, when Paul brought me the play that he had written, it had stirred in me the strongest creative impulse. I had to write, and I was hardly conscious of any effort save that of holding the pen. "I fancy now," I went on, "that my work on his play perhaps gave Paul a sense of the easy habit of camaraderie between us. He believed that we might go on working together, with happy results, and even earn a great deal of money."

Gay was looking at me, his lips set in a tense curve.

"No doubt," he said.

I went on as if the rock had been smitten, and the waters gushed forth.

"You see, Gay, the feeling comes over me now and then, that since I have to pay for my mistake, I may as well figure up the items, and try to understand what it all amounts to. I seem to see one fact clear, in one blinding flash. My writing the play spoke to Paul like a subtle ap-

peal. It must have cried out that I longed to do something for him: to prove that I could do everything for him. Although I did not stop to define to myself what I had done, he understood. . . . If I was blind he was not. . . . He must have guessed that I loved him before he ever spoke. . . . He may have spoken simply out of kindness."

As I said this to Gay something seemed broken within me. I shrank back into myself, covered my face with my hands, and suffered from head to foot. I seemed to feel my whole being burn up with my scorn of myself for having unwittingly confessed to Paul that I loved him. As I took my hand away from Gay he had sprung up, and for a few moments paced up and down the room. Now that I had begun to speak, the necessity seemed borne in upon me to tell him the whole story.

"But, Gay, there were times," I faltered, "there were times when I was sure that he" —

"Sure that he loved you?" When I did not finish the sentence Gay completed it for me.

"Yet," I said eagerly, "sometimes I could have no doubt of it."

For example, I went on to tell about one night in spring, when Paul had stopped in on his way to dine with some friends who lived on Riverside Drive, not far above us. It had been a warm night, and I had put on a white summer frock.

Somebody, probably Mr. Rose, had sent me some pink roses, and I had fastened one in my belt and another at my throat. When I went in Paul had made not the least move, but had sat still for a long moment looking at me in silence. Then he had caught my hand and drawn down my — I had to break off here, for Gay, standing in front of me, made an imperative gesture, as if to forbid me to say more; as if he could bear no more.

"He just whispered two words," I faltered, "just two words. But he must have believed at that moment that he loved me."

"It is no difficult matter to me to believe that he loved you very much," Gay began; "but" —

"But what is one moment?" I said. "It was Jean who had bewitched him, who held him. I never could keep up with Jean. He found something in her, — just the congenial touch that I had not. They both liked to do things in an easy irresponsible way. He loved to laugh at me for being a Plymouth Rock Philistine."

Gay had sat down again and now was listening quietly.

"Again and again I made him see that I was unyielding in certain matters," I went on, and described to Gay how, when Paul suggested that I should sell the Swallowfield place, I had been stubborn. "Now, Jean in my position," I added, "would have been willing to throw everything

away, to get rid of any impediment, at any price, in order that they might be free and happy."

"But not you, Marcia," said Gay.

"No, not I. I suppose that my pride is the chief part of me."

"Your heart is the chief part of you," cried Gay, speaking with strong feeling. "And I suppose, Marcia, with that great heart of yours, you had to love somebody, love somebody just in this way. I have tried to believe that it was almost inevitable that you should have loved Chauncey, and, taking Chauncey for what he seems to be, I suppose that, loving him, you had to be struck down, as it were with a traitor's knife, and to endure all this agony." He had laid his hand on my arm; he was leaning forward; his real kindness penetrated, pierced, reached that inner sense of bewildered pain. "But, Marcia," he went on, "don't believe that in this feeling for Chauncey your heart has reached its limit. You are not so easily spent. Something else will come to you, something better." He half drew back as he said this, and something between a laugh and a sob broke from him. "Don't imagine I mean myself," he now exclaimed. "Think of me just as the little stuttering fellow you used to tolerate as a playmate. Think of me as a brother, or a friend, or any useful thing you may call upon at need."

I did think of him, and very kindly, and I said

so, brokenly. It had helped me to open my heart to Gay.

"What I could not endure," he said now, "was to think of you fighting a silent, solitary fight."

"I am not fighting," I returned. "I feel stronger already. I am going to rally presently. When Miss Keogh came to me, and asked, 'Can you bear it?' and I replied, yes I could bear it, what she said was, 'Well, if you can bear it, then it is to be borne.'"

"It was just an experiment," said Gay, "and it has failed. Some day you will see that this experience was not your whole life, only the beginning. You are going to do great things, Marcia. It is not the happy, contented people who move the world."

Ah, how I longed to do the great things Gay predicted.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN A LADY 'S IN THE CASE

"ALL partings are hard," observed Mr. Bevis. "I hate to give up my old trousers; worse still my old coats, and I will not consent to be parted from my old shoes. They and I are inseparable, bound together until death us do part. One grows used to things; the edges get rounded off; one fits into the curves and the seams. Besides, there is a powerful appeal to one's vanity in the thought that a thing is just one's own and nobody else's whatever. There is sure to be a wrench if anything we have cared about has to go."

What had inspired these philosophical reflections was the news that a part of the collection was to be given away, and I had remarked that it was hard for me to part with some of the familiar objects. He proceeded: —

"You young people will finally come to believe as we old people do, that in this life there are few meetings but many partings."

"In one way I rejoice that I see an end to this work," I went on, without dwelling on his theory of life. "I long to be through with it in

order to sit down and begin what I need to do. But I have had to think about Miss Keogh so long that I constantly say to myself, 'How is she ever to get on without me, without some one to look after her?' I have grown so fond of her; she is such a delicate, feminine, rather fascinating personality, — and it will be hard for us to part."

I looked at Mr. Bevis and met a peculiar alertness of expression in his blue eyes.

"Don't you think so?" I demanded.

"Think what? That it will be hard for her to part with you? No doubt of that."

"No, I mean that she is an interesting personality; rather peculiarly attractive."

"Oh, yes, she is one of those altruistic people who wish to renounce everything. But I was telling her yesterday that the worth of altruism hinges on whether the altruist is able to do anything for other people. In order to become an altruist, somebody has first to have been an egoist."

"I think she has given away all she needs to give away," I replied, "I should like to have her devote the rest of her life to being happy herself. I hate to see good things and good people wasted on the desert air. She is still young; that is, comparatively young, — young enough," I added, rather awkwardly.

"Young enough? May I ask for what?" Mr. Bevis inquired, with unmistakable *flair* for some subtlety of intention behind my words.

I decided to dismiss subtlety and to be absolutely frank.

"Young enough to fall in love and be fallen in love with," I explained. "I want her to have some life of her own, — some individual happiness. She has done a great deal of good with her money, but I think this constant sense of misery she cannot help, — of the physical pain of the world, the mental pain, — her feeling for the miserable failure of humanity to get decent comfort out of life is likely to wear her out. If she could only marry somebody, some good man who would look after her and help her."

Mr. Bevis's blue eyes had grown very prominent. He had turned red to his hair, and his whole face showed an almost indignant expression.

"You mean Bickerdyke!" The words seemed to burst from him as if they were the explosion of some long, silent but deep exasperation.

"Oh, certainly not Mr. Bickerdyke! After Miss Keogh's long penances I should n't think of condemning her to a marriage with Mr. Bickerdyke."

"Oh," said Mr. Bevis. "I thought of course you alluded to Mr. Bickerdyke. Look here, Marcia, did n't you ever think that Bickerdyke was a little — just a little" —

"Mr. Bickerdyke! Why, he is, I don't begin to know, how old! and has already been married once — a long time ago."

"I always observed that marriage gets to be a sort of habit," said Mr. Bevis.

"But, dear Mr. Bevis, I am not talking about Mr. Bickerdyke at all. I am talking about somebody a great deal more agreeable, more fascinating, — somebody who, delightful as he is already, needs a wife to round out and complete his existence: a wife with some money to spend; who could help him to carry out every fad and hobby; let him have every sort of garden he is pining for; an English garden, a Japanese garden, an Italian garden, a Moorish garden."

Mr. Bevis had grown quite pale. His blue eyes, which remained fastened on me, kept their startled expression, but he did not speak.

"Dear Mr. Bevis," I now ventured, "why have you never married?"

"Gracious," he returned testily, "I have always felt that I was too young."

"Still, one constantly gets a little older, and you must acknowledge that you ought sooner or later to try to make some woman happy."

"Marcia," he cried in a voice of helpless appeal, "you surely don't mean" —

"That is exactly what I do mean, dear Mr. Bevis."

"Goodness gracious," Mr. Bevis murmured. "Gracious goodness!"

But his pallor had lessened perceptibly. The corners of his lips turned in a little. I could see

that he was not disagreeably stirred. Possibly he was even amused by my suggestion.

"But you don't think," he now began — The pallor was quite gone now, and instead began to appear a suffusion of rosiness which gradually mounted to his forehead, invaded his very ears; while under his fine, scanty, silky brown hair his very head blushed. "But you don't think," he began again, with an air of intense effort, "you don't think that she" — Evidently it was beyond his power to sum up the situation in a phrase. Accordingly I tried to help him.

"That she cares for you?" I suggested.

But I had shocked him; his delicacy was in arms. He made a sweeping gesture of denial.

"Marcia, am I such a coxcomb?" he asked superbly. "Am I such a — coward as to put that question to anybody except the chief person in the affair?"

I inquired meekly what he had meant, and in spite of the distinct brutality of rendering anything so fine, almost impalpable, as his thought was in words, he did contrive to hazard the observation:—

"I have occasionally entertained some notion that she was rather taken up with Bickerdyke."

Evidently this idea of Mr. Bickerdyke was not only disturbing but hindering. Having, with unhesitating caprice, decided that fate offered a great opportunity for happiness and useful-

ness to Mr. Bevis and Miss Keogh, I determined to eliminate Mr. Bickerdyke, and I did so, to my own satisfaction at least. I loved and esteemed Mr. Bickerdyke. I had reason to be grateful to him; but the thought of him in such a connection seemed to me incongruous, almost grotesque. Mr. Bevis, on the contrary, by many degrees of affinity, fitted into my scheme. He amused and entertained Miss Keogh; she often spoke of him; had once said that his clever and original way of putting things was a relief; that even when he laughed at certain ideas it had helped her to look at the question from another side, and so the better to understand her own idea. "She often says," I pursued, "that we have all helped her to know how to live; that in all her life she has never been so happy as she is now, and what I feel is that she deserves to be happier still."

Mr. Bevis had listened with curious intentness, and now, with this intimation of Miss Keogh's deserving a supremer felicity, his look, his change of attitude spoke for him. "*With me?*" his whole manner seemed to ask.

"Exactly, with you," I said. "She is absolutely certain to marry somebody, and I should like to have her marry somebody who" — I paused for a moment. "You like her, admire her, I am sure of that?" I further ventured.

"Oh, yes, I like Miss Keogh, I admire Miss

Keogh." Still his tone did not carry absolute conviction. I waited for something more to come. "I don't know," he finally added, "that I particularly covet any of Nick Keogh's money."

"Oh, yes, you do; to spend it in just the right way. I always did long to have you able to carry out all your ideas about a garden."

Mr. Bevis gave me a comprehensive little nod.

"And there is something in what you say about her being sure to marry somebody," he now observed. "For she is comparatively young. It seems to me sometimes as if this past year she had actually grown younger under our eyes."

"I think she has. Besides, I have seen to it that she dresses more youthfully."

"I don't know about her dress, but twice I have seen her blush. Only this morning, indeed, she blushed. Why, it was quite juvenile."

Nothing could please me better than this confession that Mr. Bevis's attention had fastened on that blush. Did it not show that some flicker of a thought, some variegated little butterfly of a wish had long been fluttering through his consciousness?

"I am not young, Marcia," he now declared, frankly challenging me.

"But you are quite young enough," I insisted. "Reading books all one's life keeps one unspoiled. It is worldliness that makes people grow old; and you are both unworldly."

"She may be, but I am not so unworldly as you may think," Mr. Bevis now confided to me, shutting one eye, and with his head a little on one side. "I have always thought I should like to be rich, just for one year. I never quite had my fling. There's my sister, you know. She always keeps her eye on the expenditures. There are certain books on gardens which I always have longed to own, but they are expensive, devilish expensive." He paused on this dangerous confession as if weighing it against his conscience. Then he proceeded: "But some men might ask for motor cars and champagne every day, out of her money."

I could understand that he was addressing arguments, not so much to me as to the subconscious, the innermost self which subjugates the will. Gradually he expanded under this new idea, and confided to me that, up to the time his eyes partly failed him and he was obliged to give up his place at the library, he had been so agreeably absorbed in his work he had had little conception of the fact that his heart was beating and time was passing. Then, making the discovery that youth had long since vanished, it had sometimes occurred to him that he had not taken his fair share of the banquet of life; had let the best dishes go past, and had left the wine untasted.

At this moment it was evidently warming to the very cockles of his heart to think that his

life might be going to expand, instead of narrowing down with the years. He had, he confessed, admired Miss Keogh from the first moment he saw her; she was like an old picture; in her presence was something cool and sweet, offering refreshment after the heat and glare of the world. She helped one, too, in her way; she was such an embodied conscience.

Perhaps I did lead Mr. Bevis on a little, breathing upon the spark of feeling which, burning up and burning down, needed just this sustained effort to keep the flame alive.

Miss Keogh's sentiments toward marriage, now that the ice was broken, were more readily to be gauged. Of course I had harped on the subject a little.

"It is such a new experience to think that any such thing could happen to me," she said one day. "All my life I had accepted the fact that I was not a favorite with fortune. I knew what to do with myself as a failure" —

"What?" I inquired. "It might prove useful knowledge to me."

"To accept the fact that happiness and success belong to others. To be glad to see more worth in others than in myself; to be grateful for small things."

I remembered that phrase from the ancients which Mr. Bickerdyke loved to repeat: "My prayer before the altars is, Grant me, ye gods,

what is my due." Foredoomed failure I might be, I probably was, but I never expected to be able to thank heaven for it.

Miss Keogh went on: "As for marriage" — then she broke off with a blush which came frequently of late and which had impressed even Mr. Bevis's near-sighted eyes. I had to wait for her to say, for it came with a great effort and in a very low voice: "As for marriage, it seems like a temptation," — she paused here but went on after a little, — "a temptation which I ought, perhaps, at my age to put behind me."

I argued plausibly that she was still young enough to have at least thirty years of lonely life before her unless she were to marry.

"It is not alone the companionship," she returned, "it is the help, the protection."

It took me a little aback to realize how she had looked at the matter all round, had even gauged its deeper meanings. She gave a little sigh of content. "And he is such a bulwark of strength," she now said. "He is so practical, sees everything so clearly."

I waived that point. Mr. Bevis was certainly most helpful, certainly full of suggestion and witty resource, but I had never considered him absolutely practical.

"I have sometimes been afraid," Miss Keogh went on in a whisper, "that his sister might not approve, — might not like me."

I said warmly that his sister ought to be glad to have her brother made happy. I had almost uttered Miss Bevis's name, but at the very suggestion of a name, Miss Keogh modestly put up her hand to stay me in my utterance so that I got no farther than the consonant. But with my intimate knowledge of Miss Keogh's jealous and fastidious taste, I was ready to respect every sort of scruple. What had happened so far had come about with unexpected ease on her side at least. I knew that she was incapable of caprices. With her, everything must be of slow growth; her heart would have no sudden and unaccountable tendencies. I could see now that all through this year there must have been going on, between Mr. Bevis and Miss Keogh, graceful attentions on his part which she had accepted; little flatteries, even little tendernesses. I could well believe it. Now, Mr. Bickerdyke was a granite sort of man. No one could have looked for little flatteries, little tendernesses from him even in one's wildest imaginings. It is said that all granite must have had its period of fire, but that period was long over for Mr. Bickerdyke. Mr. Bevis, however, like Miss Keogh herself, had not only never been married but had never even had a love affair. If in every man's heart is the grave of a poet that died in youth, in Mr. Bevis the poet was not dead. He was bubbling over with poetry. Even his fads and hobbies were

associated with delightful qualities of imagination. Indeed, I could perceive that as this new idea gained ground in his mind it touched his imagination in so powerful a way that he was thrown a little off his balance. One day when he and Mr. Bickerdyke were lunching with us it began to seem to me that the sentimental current in his veins was almost too strong. He could hardly address a remark to Miss Keogh without assuming the most curiously imbecile smirk. He blushed, he fidgeted, made the oddest answers, argued from the most impossible standpoints, and brought forward the most incredible views.

Something in Mr. Bickerdyke's uncompromising demeanor, his frank stare at Mr. Bevis, made me feel that perhaps I ought to take him into our confidence. I dreaded the effect of an overpowerful surprise.

CHAPTER XXI

ANOTHER KIND OF LOVER

"But why, may I ask, Mr. Bevis?" Mr. Bickerdyke inquired sharply, when I confided to him my dislike of leaving Miss Keogh in solitude; when I put before him the possible lonely years stretching out before her; her need of help and sympathy at every turn, and added that I wished she might make a happy marriage.

"But why, I ask, Mr. Bevis?" Mr. Bickerdyke repeated, as if with rising exasperation.

"She is so young, so pretty, so attractive," I went on. "She calls herself old, but practically she is young."

"Certainly young, certainly pretty, certainly attractive," granted Mr. Bickerdyke, "but why Bevis? Bevis, a man of fads, of sixteen ways of looking at a subject! A man, I am willing to grant, of much learning, of not a little erudite information, but utterly unpractical."

"I think that is why I should like Miss Keogh to marry him. He needs her as much as she needs him. He is so interesting, so all-round, so full of ideas, he could put a great deal into her life," I persisted, quite carried away with the

need of winning over a powerful auxiliary like Mr. Bickerdyke. "She needs different ideas from those which have been impressed upon her all her life. She seems to believe that she can go back to her old narrow ways and be happy, but I should like to have her settled in a beautiful place, somewhere, with a nice attentive husband who would vary her life. For instance, give her all sorts of gardens, an Italian garden, an English garden, a French garden, a Moorish garden."

"But why, I ask you, Mr. Bevis?" demanded Mr. Bickerdyke, who had by this time risen to his feet and was looking down upon me with awful asperity. "I expect to marry Miss Keogh myself."

I could only ejaculate, "You! dear Mr. Bickerdyke, you!"

"Well, why not?" returned Mr. Bickerdyke, reseating himself at the other end of the table, where we had been working together. "Do you see anything in me unsuitable, Marcia? I am a younger man than Bevis; I am more in sympathy with Miss Keogh's ideas; I am a more religious man. I will not say I am a handsomer man, although I see no signs of good looks in him, for I know that I am not a handsome man. But, Marcia, if you will look at the pictures of the men who have accomplished the best work in the world, you will find that they are not in

general handsome men. In fact, the force that moves society is largely a matter of nose."

I looked at Mr. Bickerdyke's nose in silence. My mistake had been colossal in its simplicity.

"Don't you agree with me?" inquired Mr. Bickerdyke.

I was considerably staggered, but I did contrive to say, "As to noses, Mr. Bevis has a large nose."

"His is a whimsical nose, an imaginative nose," said Mr. Bickerdyke. "Compare it to mine and you will see that it is a weak nose." He paused a moment as if to gather fresh momentum; then went on, "It is incredible that any thinking person could suggest him as a possible husband for Miss Keogh. He is the sort of man to wake up some morning and reflect that it bored him to be married, and who would go and hide himself in the next street for the rest of his life, like Hawthorne's hero. Miss Keogh, that is — Winifred, needs a tower of strength, a force that sustains. Bevis! Bevis would rather raise a fine rose than rear a fine soul. He asks himself of all his works, 'How will this look to my cultured, my æsthetic taste?' What — er — er — Winifred asks of her work is, 'How will it look to my Maker?'"

Blind as a bat had I been.

"Don't you see," Mr. Bickerdyke pursued, with some heat, "that between me and — er —

Winifred there exists a peculiar affinity, indeed, the closest possible affinity of soul? Marcia, it really hurts my feelings that you of all people could have failed to notice it."

He seemed so little displeased, only so disappointed, that my finer insight had been lacking, it really touched me.

"Somehow your life seemed to be so complete I had never associated the idea of marriage with you, Mr. Bickerdyke," I faltered, "while Mr. Bevis" —

"You cannot drive a nail in wax," said Mr. Bickerdyke with conviction. "Besides, he is too old for Winifred." Perhaps he saw incredulity in my face, for he now exclaimed, "Bevis must be long past fifty, while I am only forty-nine. I shall not be fifty until January."

He stiffly proclaimed this fact, and of course it was true, — nevertheless Mr. Bickerdyke always seemed to me to be old, while Mr. Bevis was eternally young. I might the better have been able to enter into Mr. Bickerdyke's feelings, to have sympathized with him, and to have laughed at my mistake, had it not been for the thought of the unhappiness my wretched bungling might have entailed upon poor Mr. Bevis.

"From the moment I first saw — er — Winifred," Mr. Bickerdyke now confided to me, in an incredibly soft voice, and with a glance and half smile which showed little of their usual rugged-

ness, "she appealed to me. I said to myself, 'This woman who makes herself a little sister of the poor, the suffering, and the unhappy, needs a man by her side; to advise her, give her strength, and uplift her to the higher conscience, and the higher law, which will finally bring her the unpurchasable reward.'"

What he said impressed me. Also the meaning behind his use of her name, Winifred, sank deep into my soul. I remembered, too, how she had spoken of some one as a "bulwark of strength."

"You don't seem to like it," Mr. Bickerdyke observed, bland and sure of himself as ever, but with a note of regret in his voice. "I supposed you would be with us, Marcia. *She* has felt sure of it."

"Oh, don't tell Miss Keogh that it took me by surprise," I gasped with instant consternation, "and don't above all tell her that I spoke of" —

"Of Bevis? Most certainly not. How could you ever have got that utterly foolish idea into your head? Did he have the presumption to suggest such a thing?"

"Oh, no, indeed, never, never, never," I cried, putting into each word all the emphasis it could carry. "Such an idea could never have presented itself to his mind. It was just a wild excursion of my own."

"Confess that you see no valid objection to

our marriage. I should like to tell Winifred that you approve."

"It is really settled, then?"

"Settled? Oh, yes. At least the matter has been understood between us for some little time." In his face, in his whole look was something that quite convinced me. His rugged strength seemed to be fused with wistfulness and tenderness. "Is there any valid objection, Marcia?" he said again.

I could act my part with Mr. Bickerdyke, also with Miss Keogh, and make clear to them my entire sympathy and good-will. Indeed, now that I began to use my feminine instinct in looking at Mr. Bickerdyke, I had to confess that I did find something in him answering to Miss Keogh's confessed ideal. But oh, Mr. Bevis! What was I to say to Mr. Bevis after flattering his vanity; not only rousing his hopes but promising him a future which was to have no dawn?

The next time he came he wore an air of such extreme dejection that it moved all my sensibilities. He seemed fairly to totter. He dropped into the nearest seat in the alcove and uttered a groan.

"Oh, Marcia, Marcia," he exclaimed.

I felt sure he must have heard the news about Miss Keogh and Mr. Bickerdyke.

"Dear Mr. Bevis," I cried, "don't take it so to heart. I cannot bear it."

"But don't you know," he began, "that we were talking about how hard it is to give up things? Did n't you agree with me that there is a subtle and powerful appeal to us in what we are used to?"

A little puzzled, I assented.

"Now there is my sister," he went on. "She and I fit into each other exactly like the wheels of a watch. What could she do without me, also what could I do without her?"

I nodded. I began to have a glimmer of hope.

"I have tried to believe," he pursued, "that even if I myself am not happy I ought to try to do what would make another person happy. But, Marcia, it 's no use. There 's nothing heroic about me. I feel that I am utterly incapable of self-sacrifice."

He looked at me so piteously; he seemed so dejected; he threw himself so humbly on my mercy that I longed to speak. But this time I determined to wait until he had made his meaning unmistakable. He continued:—

"I have always looked upon women as a branch of study I had not yet taken up. When I begin with them at an early age, as I did with you and Dorothy, they don't seem so utterly incomprehensible. But Miss Keogh"—he broke off with a shake of the head.

"Surely," I ventured to put in, "you could never call Miss Keogh incomprehensible."

He looked at me with his head a little on one side.

"Not for the man who holds the key," he said. "But honestly, now, I don't think I do. The more I think of that plan of yours, Marcia, the more it seems to me a very good plan, in general, but not for me in particular. What I think is, that Bickerdyke is the fellow you are after."

"Oh, Mr. Bevis!"

"I am very sorry to disappoint you," he said, sweetly and candidly; "but as I told you before, I have a horror of partings. I should hate to give up my comfortable old things. I love my old ways. Besides, I don't think I have the requisite qualities of a husband. There is something so devilish continuous about marriage. If one could be married for a month, or a year, — but to have to look forward to nothing else until death! No, I don't think I should shine as a husband, that is, except in some particular cases. I should n't mind marrying you the least bit in the world, Marcia. It would never occur to me to think I had to entertain *you*. You and I always entertain each other. But Miss Keogh!" He actually gave a little shudder. "Please give up that notion of yours," he whispered.

"I begin to perceive it is not the thing."

"Not the thing at all. At first I only took in your flattering impression of it. I did n't look

at the facts of the case. But I see now that what she needs is a big bow-wow sort of man; a mastiff sort of man. Now I'm only a lap-dog sort of man. Bickerdyke will suit her down to the ground."

CHAPTER XXII

MARCIA'S FORTUNE

Ah, the great things I, Marcia Chauncey Dundas, was to have accomplished! That splendid pose of youth with which I had flung defiance at fate! It was just five years after Miss Keogh and Mr. Bickerdyke were married that I had to give up my long dream and my splendid hope. For the honors of victory were snatched from my hand, and I fell back from the race in which I had meant to be both swift and strong.

At last some of the Western lands had turned out rich.

I had been hard at work all through those five years. I had lived by myself in a little apartment not far from Aunt Mary's. I had begun to feel that I was on the right road; the road that was leading me to moderate prosperity. Any literary life must be so intensely personal a thing that its operations elude one when one tries to define them. But let me tell of one day toward the end of March. It was a day in March like any other day, with sunshine and flying clouds outside; inside, the fire burned steadily in the living-room where I sat; flowers were in the

window and on the table, while I, at my desk, worked in feverish haste over a story already bespoken, — indeed, for which the printers were waiting. In imagination I had finished it yesterday; to-day I had sprung up at sunrise, pulsing and quivering with the sense of having to make up the lost hours. Now, until the last word should drop off my pen I must feel goaded and tormented. The janitor downstairs had orders to admit no one; on no account was I to be disturbed. But, by some fatality, again and again a knock came at my door. My aunt had sent a messenger who was to bring back an answer; a registered letter or parcel required my signature. At each interruption I had suffered; even the ticking of the clock affected my nerves, for it meant that time was passing. More than once I felt as if I had completely lost my grip on the story; all I had done seemed stereotyped and colorless. I began to tell myself that again my whole day was spoiled. More and more all sense of actuality seemed to have slipped away from me; I had to grope for my aim. I gnawed my penholder; jumped up and paced the room; sat down and looked longingly out of the window at the blue sky and the white fleecy clouds; at the hyacinths blossoming on the window sill. The passionate desire to create and express seemed wholly quenched. What would it be to let my work drop from my hands! Simply to

feel, enjoy, possess, without being in haste to speak; to express — to define my idea?

"Man is born a slave;
A slave he dies. Will even Death reveal to him
Why thus he labor'd in this vale of tears;
Why thus he suffered, wept, endured, then vanished?"

The day was passing, a sense of my inefficacy, of disrelish of my task grew stronger, threatened to overpower me. Then something else interposed; I took myself as it were between my two hands.

"It is of no use," I said, "putting on these airs of hopeless despair. This story has to be finished."

I went to work anew. I had somehow regained my equipoise. Tides of warm fresh feeling began to pulse through my veins. I was once more writing swiftly and surely, enjoying every turn of a phrase, every step of the little drama unfolding under my hand.

Suddenly came a knock at the door.

"Please say I am engaged," I called. "My time is of the utmost consequence."

"So is ours," answered a voice that seemed to be familiar. "I think you will have to let us in."

I could have shed tears. Something long desired; something beautiful; something almost within reach, seemed to take wings and fly away forever.

But I sprang up and flung the door wide. There stood Mr. Chilton, Mr. Lee, and his son Gaynor, and as I met their eyes I was instantly aware that they had come on no ordinary errand. It meant some strange event. They were all a little moved and tremulous. They came in in a body; Gay closed the door behind them, and we four stood there together for a moment without any one's uttering a word.

It was Mr. Lee who broke silence, who put his arm about me, kissed me, called me his dear, dear Marcia, and thanked Heaven that he had lived to see this day. Mr. Chilton followed suit with equal ardor, and with no less emotion, and then I stared at Gay to see what I might apprehend from him. But Gay only caught both my hands in his and said, —

"Our old dreams have come true, Marcia. We have brought you the news that there is a fortune waiting for you. You have only got to sign your name and you will be an independently rich woman."

Then he, too, was a little carried away. He put a hand on each of my shoulders, and looked into my face while his color came and went.

"Oh, Marcia," he said in a tone that came from deep, tender, long repressed feeling, "you will not have to toil away by yourself any longer."

The news disturbed me; upsetting all my little world of ambition and effort. I seemed at

this moment not to long to be rich. Still, my mind was busy with the possibilities of the affair.

"What is it?" I asked. "Have they found oil or coal?"

"It's that confounded old silver mine," struck in Mr. Chilton, and at this phrase both he and Mr. Lee laughed as at the most exquisite joke.

"What, is there actually silver in Uncle Harry's mine?"

"No, copper."

First they made me sit down. Then they all began to talk at once. Copper in considerable quantities had been found in the region about eighteen months before, and Gay had spent all last summer in prospecting Uncle Harry's long disused claim, in studying rocks and soil. Certain signs had very soon made him feel sure that he was on the right track, but the vein had lain well concealed, and great excavations had to be made, so that the worth of the "find" was not at first an easy matter to establish. The period of suspense had been so trying, even to him, that it had seemed better to keep the news from me until the undertaking spelled certainty. Now every test had been answered; the assay had been made, and showed ninety-six per cent pure copper. From the very beginning of the experiment, the company who controlled the adjoining mine had been frantically eager to get hold of this deposit, which they felt sure was the most

valuable part of the whole lode. The moment the assay was completed they had made an offer; an offer communicated by letter, and which Gay now laid before me in black and white.

It stunned me. There could be no doubt but that fortune had smiled again upon the Dundases. Not in their palmiest days had they commanded wealth like this now offered me. My own petty ambitions seemed to shrivel up into insignificance.

Mr. Chilton put in an observation, with a hand borne down hard on my shoulder, while I still sat staring hard at the letter.

"Gaynor Lee's knowledge of mining," he said, "and also his knowledge of men, and his tact in holding the situation, have counted for no little. He has carried through this whole undertaking with an insight, a discretion, and a wisdom which call for your very highest appreciation."

I stretched out my hand. "Oh, Gay knows that I am grateful; that I am always grateful," I said.

Gay caught my hand and held it while he looked at me anxiously.

"You don't seem glad, Marcia," he said. "I hoped you'd be very glad that you were rich enough at last to live in the old place at Swallowfield."

"It makes me so humble," was what I answered. "I feel beaten."

"You will get over your surprise presently," said Mr. Chilton, "and then you will begin to realize that this is not only your great day, but that all that your great-grandmother reckoned on, all that your father hoped for, and gave up his rights for, has finally come to pass. Your trustees have held on to those Western lands through much evil report, and with no good report. Everybody has said over and over again that they were not worth the taxes. All this opportunity of yours to-day might have been flung away years ago unless we had obeyed not only the letter of your great-grandmother's will but the spirit of it."

Then Mr Lee began. Mr. Lee was frankly proud of Gay. Gay had done it all. Gay laughed and said that he had n't made the copper; the copper had been waiting all the time. Indeed, the fault was everybody's for not finding it long before. Yes, the copper had been waiting all the time, — all through my father's lifetime. The knowledge of it would have made a great difference, — the difference of life and death.

I think they all understood why this news that fortune had come back to us, — that riches had dropped into my lap without effort did not at once make me jubilant; why I begged to have the whole matter kept quiet between ourselves for a little time yet. I had first to live through

this moment when a strange, almost terrifying sensation took possession of me; as if my horizons had suddenly shut down close, as if, if I had to go on one step, I should go over the side of the world. It seemed to me as if I had for years been walking with my eyes bandaged and as if now I dare not open them and look round freely.

When all three men had gone away I sat down and finished my story. I was glad to feel some solid earth under me. A curious dread had to be met presently, a dread of the empty hours and days and years of my life. Now that I was to be no longer coerced by the endless task, I felt the oppression I have sometimes experienced in entering a long tunnel; as if I did not believe there could possibly be any daylight ahead.

CHAPTER XXIII

BRINGING MY SHEAVES WITH ME

Yes, those five years had given me a life that beckoned, that promised, that flattered, sometimes even fulfilled. Not always; sometimes it had hurt me, disappointed me, made me utterly despair. But it is the not succumbing, it is the struggle, the hardly earned success, which gives life its real enchantment. And at first I felt gripped by a sense of the pity of all that I was losing, as if in breaking away I had left the best part of myself behind. Not that I pitied the world for missing all the novels and stories I had meant to write. I did not suspect myself of possessing genius. I knew too well how hard I had worked, just as cobblers work, and bricklayers and breakers of stone on the road; I knew, too, that after the expenditure of all my best pains what I had accomplished had often been incredibly bad. Nevertheless, I had been patient with myself, being convinced that all the time I was learning how to write and conscious that I had a long life before me, so could afford to postpone the great success, the brilliant victory, the easy conquest of the world

which I had so valiantly promised on my twenty-first birthday.

When in May I went to take possession of my place in Swallowfield, I had my great-grandmother's picture taken down and hung where I could look at that strong, sad, indomitable face, while I ate my solitary meals. I would say to her, —

"Well, dear great-grandmother, you have had your will, but I have not had mine! I went away in mourning and have come back bringing sheaves with me; but the sheaves are, after all, your sheaves. I have gathered no sheaves except of your saving."

Yes, I wished I might have had one surpassing, one triumphant success, not have come untried, untested into these new riches by this strange fluke of destiny. Not that, like Miss Keogh, I had any dread of this unexpected fortune. Nor had I the least desire to renounce it; indeed, no particular doubt as to how I should spend it. I had always, all my life, been thinking of what I should do if I could get money enough to come back to Swallowfield and live in the old house in the old way. I had no wish to create any unreal atmosphere of beauty and of luxury. Mr. Chilton and Mr. Lee and Mr. Bevis and Mr. and Mrs. Bickerdyke had joyfully accepted the task of getting the place ready for me. Even before the end of March a whole army of plumb-

ers, carpenters, painters, decorators, and gardeners had been set to work out of doors and in. I had not meddled in the matter, except to insist that everything should be left practically unchanged. It was a relief when I came to take possession to find that something remained in the look and touch of the furniture, in the calm faces of the mirrors, in the repose of the pictures and portraits, which told me they had forgotten nothing; that they had made a part of the old life and that the thought of it belonged to them still. I should not have liked anything startlingly new which the old things might look at with a sense of estrangement or with fine, silent criticism. Even the servants provided to take care of the house and place and to wait upon me were quiet, serious, middle-aged.

Mr. Bevis had been superintending the making over of the gardens. He was the really exultant person of all concerned; had buried himself in florist's catalogues, had made lists, given incalculable orders, had in fact arrived at the very acme of enjoyment. He made nothing of running up from his house at High Elms three times a week, and one morning when I had not been established many days he came in at nine o'clock begging me to go out and look at the way the rose hedges were all coming on. He was so much interested in every shoot of the ramblers, in the way each one twined and

clambered, in the fine dark green shade of the leaves, that I felt half envious. I was ready to love it all, but as yet I could not feel, as did Mr. Bevis, with every leaf and blade of grass.

"What should I have done without you!" I exclaimed. "Don't you remember how I longed to have you marry Miss Keogh, simply to give you the chance to lay out an ideal garden? What a pity, what a sheer waste it would have been!"

"It was a temptation, Marcia," said Mr. Bevis. "But I looked the risks in the face. I felt that I could not keep it up. Now old Bickerdyke actually seems to like it. This is more in my line."

Certainly this was in Mr. Bevis's line. He was in love; the very fire of passion burned with an ardent white flame in him, but it was for every seed that sprouted, every stalk that shot upward. I could not but think what a waste it was to love anything except nature. Nature works up to beneficent results according to fixed laws. Human beings are so disappointing in comparison with roses and apples, it is a grievous thing to have to depend upon human beings.

"The world is n't too much with you," I said to Mr. Bevis. "Everything you see in nature is yours."

"Not a bit more has the world spoiled you, Marcia," he replied. "Everybody has said, 'I

suppose now that Miss Dundas is so well off she will go to Europe,' or 'Miss Dundas will do this, or Miss Dundas will do that.' I have answered them Miss Dundas is not that kind of vulgar person. She will simply settle down and enjoy having a garden."

"No, I don't wish to be a vulgar person, if that is the way you describe a person who, when she has a little money, sets off at once for Europe. But then, I have been in Europe three times. I suppose Americans need to go to Europe, if only to find out that almost everything that is best in the world was done and thought before America was discovered. Just as somebody has observed that it is necessary to study the classics in order to understand the fact that wisdom existed before we came into the world, and that Plato and Seneca had really said everything."

"I should like to go round the world," said Mr. Bevis, "to visit all the gardens that exist, Moorish, Indian, Japanese."

"Oh, you are young," I said, "you have a wish."

Mr. Bevis peered into my face to ask without actually putting the question whether I had not a wish.

"You have n't got over the surprise of all this yet," he said. "You will find out presently that you have a great many wishes. You will see

that with your youth and your strength and your independence and your emancipation from belittling vanities, you can do a great deal in the world, and you will love to do it."

"At this moment I pine for a belittling vanity or two," I returned. "Almost the first exclamation of Aunt Mary and Lilly when they heard about the copper mine was, 'Now do have all your things straight out from Paris!'"

"Well, do have all your things straight out from Paris," said Mr. Bevis. "And you may perhaps find that you have some little vanities after all."

"If you really wish to make me vain you had much better tell me that you had always supposed I did have my clothes straight out from Paris."

"Marcia," said Mr. Bevis, "from the moment I first saw you as a little girl, I seemed to see not your clothes but your soul; a good, brave, honest, noble soul. So I never think about your clothes at all."

"But my clothes are very good," I insisted. "I dress very well. The only difference I shall make is that hereafter in pleasant weather I shall put on a perfectly clean white frock every day, perhaps two or three times a day."

"Like the man who wanted a big dinner regardless of expense, so ordered two turkeys and two plum-puddings."

"Precisely."

It was always an easy matter to be confidential with Mr. Bevis, and I amused myself now by telling him about the different ways in which my friends had taken the news of the increase in my means. Nobody had been let into the secret until past the middle of April. Then it had gradually come out through my having whispered it to Aunt Mary, who of course told Lilly, now Mrs. Jack Bell. I had also let the Chesters know. Mr. and Mrs. Bickerdyke had been made aware of my change of fortune almost from the first, and Mrs. Bickerdyke had said, —

"Oh, how much good you can do, Marcia," while Mr. Bickerdyke's word was, —

"Now you can bring the old place up to a high degree of perfection. I never could afford to buy half enough of those expensive fertilizers."

The first exclamation of not a few people had been, "Now you will not have to write any more," which had displeased me singularly. It was Mr. Felix Rose who had the grace to observe, "I shall miss the books you might have written, that you will now have no time and no desire to write."

"Very clever of Mr. Felix Rose," said Mr. Bevis; "that is one of the few speeches that another man has uttered which I should like to have said myself."

It had all come out in a quiet way, and without any sort of golden flourishes. It was simply understood that the Western lands so long retained in the family had finally been sold to good advantage, and that I had means substantial enough to enable me to come here and live permanently. In Swallowfield nobody had seemed to be in the least degree surprised. Already the observation had been made to me, a dozen times by different friends and neighbors, that they had always known that the Dundases would turn out rich again because they had held on to their land. I told Mr. Bevis I was glad to have come back to the place without any flourish of trumpets. The one thing I desired was to take up my duties honestly and simply without any sort of pose, without any feeling that I had to set about what is called "doing good" with my money. Not but that I hoped to do some good.

We were walking toward the old brick wall which bounded the north side of the garden, and which, stained, weathered, broken, had been renewed so that Mr. Bevis was now training some dwarf fruit-trees on its warm side.

"Does n't it seem to you as if the place had missed you, and had its own joy in having you back?" he inquired. "Now look at the way the little green leaves on those elm-trees rest against the sky. Is n't there a joy about it all?"

"Well, yes."

"Marcia," said Mr. Bevis, "when we were talking just now about my not having married Miss Keogh, and you said you were glad, I longed to retort, but did n't quite venture, that I was also very glad you were not married." He said this a little sharply, as if he were trying a bit of steel and wanted to hear it ring out true. His look emphasized the significance of his words.

"I am not married, and I never expect to be married," I answered as clearly, and giving him glance for glance.

"Oh, but you will marry some day. You will marry a good fellow, a noble fellow, a sweet fellow," said Mr. Bevis. "I never did want you to marry a demigod, a sort of half-spoiled god, that is. A good, sweet, noble-minded, generous young fellow is better."

"I shall not marry either gods or men," I persisted. "The only trouble is, never having children, I shall have nobody to whom to leave the place. If Paul Chauncey had had a son I might have left it to him on condition of his taking the name of Dundas. But I understand that they have no children. Mr. Chilton insists, in fact he wrote to me only yesterday, that I must make my will, and I suppose I must make my will, and all I can think of is that I shall leave this place to Gaynor Lee. Now if you were only a little younger, Mr. Bevis, or if you had married and had a son" —

I had spoken very quietly, but still what I had said had not been easy to say. It was the first time, for five years, that I had spoken Paul Chauncey's name. Mr. Bevis put his hand on my wrist, and detained me.

"Give all you can to Gay, dear," he said. "Nobody else deserves it so well."

"Very well. Mr. Chilton is coming to-morrow. My will shall be made, and it shall say that when I die, this place shall go to Gay."

I left Mr. Bevis there training the branches of the young fruit-trees along the warm wall in the sunshine, and walked on. I had told him to-day that it was my intention to walk all over my place by myself. It was barely ten o'clock, and I set out. Never in all my life had I felt so lonely as I felt at that moment, so haunted by the doom of irrevocable loneliness, never but once; and that was long ago. Here I was again alone; just as I had been in those languid, mild Indian summer days which had followed the sharp frost that cut down all the flowers except the melancholy chrysanthemums; just when the news came of my father's death, — the news that killed my mother. I had felt then like the lame bird of the flock left behind to watch its mates in their arrowy flight vanish behind the hills, and to suffer and to die. I had not died, however. All that anguish had been borne and lived through. I had gone away in mourning, and had now at

last come back bringing rich sheaves with me. Yet, here I was again all alone, and I stood for a moment looking about me, and trying to take the idea of it in.

The house stood big and warm and strong on its high level above the two streets which it faced at right angles. Beyond the lawn and the gardens the ground fell away to the orchard, then rose again with a lovely sunny slope to the long hill on whose brow three elm-trees towered. Toward the west the land dipped and curved down to the pastures, through whose flat lands ran the Swallow River. Beyond the river the country swelled again until it met the higher line of woods. All round Swallowfield ran a blue mountain line. The mountains were not high mountains nor the river a great river, still it was a beautiful region, and worth a grateful swelling of the heart. To-day when I reached the top of the hill I could see the river so blue in all its many windings, while the meadow grass was delicately green. The fruit-trees, too, were lovely with their leaves and buds, and their occasional stars of blossom. It was all very fair to see. Then the mountains took on so many lovely hues, purple, amethyst, chocolate, and blue, that I longed once more to be awake, alive, to feel it all, to love it and to glory in it all, as I had loved it and gloried in it as a child.

I stood musing, trying to think what might be

done, what should be done. After a little time I must have the place full of live things; of dogs, Alderney cows, horses; particularly a horse that I could ride. Instantly with the idea of a horse came Paul's, —

"Ride, ride together, forever ride."

His very voice sounded in my ears, and in haste I struck across the fields to gain the lane that led to the river. Not to walk on the springing grain, I kept on the turf close to the fence. Here every sort of wild flower was in bud or blossom; I counted six kinds of violets, two of white, two of blue, and one yellow, besides the bird's-foot violet. There were anemones, also, and spring beauties, and here and there a late bloom of blue liverwort showed, not yet gone to seed. I reached the lane, which was full of birds. There must have been a dozen different kinds. It was curious how many distinct notes could be heard; songs, carols, whistles, calls, chirps, and cries. Just where I had paused to watch and listen I happened to see that the meadow at my right was covered with a sheet of bluets or Quaker-ladies. I climbed over, sat down, and kneeling close, looked at them face to face. As my eye refined itself to the delicacy of each minute flower, every one a perfect star, a sense of the boundlessness of creation came over me; just what I feel sometimes in looking up at the stars

in the heavens on a clear night. One might easily say that God loves stars, for Nature repeats the shape so endlessly. It was curious to reflect how each of these bluets so fine, so pure, so individual, so just itself, was absolutely complete in its little life. It lost none of its identity by being one of the myriads of this milky way. I recalled how once, when I had climbed the steep sides of the Hörnli, the rocky peak just under the Matterhorn, I had sunk down for a moment's rest in order that I might take fresh breath, and had counted the different flowers within my reach. Besides the dark velvety pansies, there had been ten distinct varieties.

What endless resource, what wit, what invention, what exquisite climaxes in Nature!

> "O thou God of old!
> Grant me some smaller grace than comes to *these;*
> But so much patience as a blade of grass
> Grows by contented through the heat and cold."

How to make something of my life, how like one of these tiny bluets honestly and sincerely to be just myself; how to select the exact constituents that go to make up a perfect life, just as the least of these flowers do, rejecting the unessential things, the poisonous things, the things not worth desiring.

Mr. Bevis had sharply challenged me by his allusion to Paul Chauncey. It had come importunately, and still rankled slightly. Perhaps

he had meant it to be a tonic, a bitter tonic that might brace me.

I had not spoken Paul Chauncey's name since the night Gay came to talk with me. It was not only that I had not spoken of Paul, but I had not thought of him. I had not lived down my love for him; I had simply thrust aside the feeling, denied it a place in my life. I had not looked the idea of Paul — what he had been to me, and must in future be to me — in the face all through these years. Just as it had been today, when the echo of Paul's words sounded in my ears, —

"Ride, ride together, forever ride," —

I had willed myself not to remember. What had happened was something not to be thought about, reasoned about, analyzed; only something merely to be accepted with the same sort of tragic acceptance I had been obliged to give to other hard facts of my life. But now at last I had spoken his name. I had even let Mr. Bevis allude to him, almost laugh at him as a demi-god, a half-spoiled demi-god. At the allusion I myself had been half inclined to smile, for perhaps Paul had been, in certain ways, a little Olympian. Olympians were always given to being spoiled by mere mortals. At this moment I was keyed to a fine susceptibility by the clear, honest little blossoms, and I said aloud: —

"Let me understand myself. Let me make an effort and think about Paul a little. Let me find out what place he still holds in my life!" Whether, I might also have said, I was still dreaming the old dream. All this time I had accepted it as inevitable that I was just where my broken engagement had left me; that in respect to my feeling for Paul I had not only stood still but I must always stand still. But was it true? Had I stood still? When I had so long felt the pressure of one absorbing motive, when I had constantly had to say to myself, "I must do this," "I must do that," "I must change this, arrive at that definite point, and above all not lose myself on the wrong road," and when I found that all my faculties would answer my will, could it possibly happen that there had been, where Paul was concerned, no change in me? no transition of feeling, no advance, no rounding of dismal capes and coming to anchor in a sure harbor?

I tried to remember now what I had heard about Paul as time had passed on. Grace had not been silent; she had spoken of him frequently; sometimes with sympathy, but often with impatience.

"What can a man be when he is a mere appendage to a successful actress, who sacrifices everybody and everything to her career?" she had exclaimed over and over.

I knew a little of Paul's occupations. He had written several plays, but only the first one, the one which he and I had written together, had held the stage. He was a master of construction, knew everything about a play except how to give it movement, color, feeling. Jean was of course a great favorite with the public, not only here but in England. Her pictures showing points of real beauty were to be seen everywhere. By this time she had a large repertoire, but in no rôle had she carried away her audiences as in Corisande. In no other character was her art so spontaneous, so unconscious. Other parts might offer an opportunity for the display of the unbridled passion which especially suited her genius, but Corisande was penetrated, spiritualized so to speak, by the appeal of the woman herself. As Corisande, Jean could act with a simplicity, a singleness of feeling which not only stirred the imagination but touched the heart.

Now that I had let the barriers all down and was thinking about Paul, — trying to remember exactly what he had once been to me, — I might, if clinging passionate memories had come over me, have given myself up to the sensation of what had been at the time delicious through and through, full of unexpectedness and charm. But I found, instead, that the clear idea of Paul came back without exerting any of its old tyranny of fascination. I found, in fact, that I was not

just the same Marcia Dundas I had been six years before. I saw, indeed, what it was well for me to see at last, that my love for Paul was just a phase of my life, a phase that had been colored with all the rose-lights of youth, and filled with the multitudinous pulsations which belong to the time when we are forming.

He had come to me by strange accident, as it were, from the very ends of the earth, and there had seemed to be a certain magic in his coming. When I had believed that I had no kin or kith alive, that all were gone, all were silent,—that of each one who belonged to me I had to say,—

> "No motion has she now, no force;
> She neither hears nor sees,
> Rolled round in Earth's diurnal course
> With rocks, and stones, and trees,"—

here Paul had appeared standing before me, tangible to sense and touch, not only alive himself, but inspiring life. At this moment I was again glad that he was alive; that he was somewhere in the world, and that some day we might meet again. I suddenly experienced an eager curiosity to know what Paul had said when he came to be told that poor Marcia was rich Marcia. It was almost with some undercurrent of ironical amusement that I realized that while he was bound, I was rich and free. I rose to my feet and looked around upon the field of bluets with that same exultant sense of freedom. If

they had their little lives to live, I also had mine. As I went on my way to the river, I seemed to have burst some bond that had held me hitherto. I no longer felt alone in the world. As I walked along the sunny lane between the banks on each side, which were blue with violets and where there was everywhere a flutter of wings, I had a keen sense of pleasure in the buzz and the whirr.

It was curious how all at once I loved my freedom. When I came to the bridge presently, and sat down where Gay and I had sat together on that September afternoon just after my coming of age, the strong voice of the river spoke to me of him and I smiled a little, thinking of Gay and of what Mr. Bevis had said. It never embarrassed or troubled me to realize that Gay cared a great deal about me. I knew that the idea of me had grown into his mind and shaped it just as the idea of this place and giving up everything for it had forced me to live according to it. I had a great regard for Gay, but not the smallest intention of marrying him or of marrying anybody. Everything had conspired to make me dreadfully individual. I had had to be just myself, Marcia Dundas; to live in myself and force all my circumstances to be part of myself; and the influences of my lonely life must, I felt, always govern me. Then the effect of Paul on my life had been to aggrandize these influences.

It was not because I had loved Paul that I felt I could not love anybody else, for I comprehended at last that I could look at that feeling all round and leave it behind me. But after caring about him just in the way I had cared about him, the thought of loving anybody else at this moment seemed an incredible thing. It had been useless to talk about the possibility of my marrying John Bell or Felix Rose, not to say Gay. John Bell had married my cousin Lilly. Felix Rose and I were good friends. As for Gay, he understood it all, and had never asked me again to marry him.

The view across the pastures on both sides of the river with their great levels of soft green, lighted up here and there by a clump of cowslips or Mayblobs, was beautiful and restful. The river, still swollen with the spring freshets, moved in such volume that here and there it quite drowned its banks, and where it made its curves little flecks of foam showed on its strong current. It was wonderful to see how many birds there were darting and wheeling and rejoicing under the great dome of blue sky, unbroken save by little downy clouds. The air was full of their notes. All at once the songs ceased. I became conscious of a strange hush; not a single bird called; I could hear nothing but the wash of the stream. The silence startled me, and I turned on all sides to see if anything had hap-

pened. Then far across the pastures, I saw something on the wing moving very low, making large, easy, measured strokes. It came nearer and nearer, and I could see that it was a large brownish bird with a speckled breast. It settled on the top rail of the fence. Perhaps it had caught sight of me and was studying me; then making me out to be harmless, it flapped its wings and again began its circular flight round and round, with ever wider diameters; crossing the river, and as it were beating the pastures as a setter beats the copse for game. Now and then it sank, evidently seizing some prey, then swung on its course, perhaps back to its nest to feed its young. Finally, when the enemy was gone, all the birds began to sing again.

CHAPTER XXIV

A BOLD WAY WITH A LADY

In March, when Gay was bursting with the good news, he told me one day that he had written to our old friend Dorothy Deane about my wonderful coming into fortune.

"Of course I had to tell Dorothy just as I had to tell Jem Nicoll," he said.

Although Dorothy had not lived in Swallowfield since she was a child, she was still easily first in the hearts of all the coterie. After Mrs. Deane had married Mr. Clare, we, that is, Gay and Lucy and I, had often visited them at High Elms. Then when Mr. Clare was sent to Europe, having at first some connection with our legation in Paris, and later in London, I had still kept in touch with Dorothy. We had been together in Switzerland one summer and again I had stayed with her for a week in London. Accordingly, when she wrote ardent congratulations that I was enabled to reopen the old house and settle down there to live, also pouring out the story of her own love for every inch of the old place, I answered at once, asking her to come and spend a month or so with me, and help me to get to living again.

I told her that not only did I need her, but that her aunt, Miss Hester Bickerdyke, longed to see her; that Miss Hester had, indeed, felt very lonely ever since her brother's marriage. Mrs. Clare answered my letter accepting the invitation. She said that she thought just that sort of a change would be good for Dorothy, who seemed in this London spring to droop a little, and to shrink from the idea of the gayeties of the opening season. Then Mrs. Clare added mysteriously, that perhaps coming back to her old friends for a while might help Dorothy to understand herself better, might enable her to regain a certain equipoise. All which suggested that even our Dorothy had some complications in her life.

So by the last of May Dorothy was with me in Swallowfield. I had not seen her since she was eighteen, when she still had the same divine babyishness of bloom and of rounded curve that had belonged to her as a child. She had not lost them now that she was a woman grown, although her figure was taller and slighter. Her hair, which was brown in the shade, but showed a gleam of gold in the light, had a crisp wave off her temples and forehead. Her eyes were brown, too; rather meditative eyes which seemed to have a world of meaning behind them. Something about the girl, in the way she sat and looked at one; in the way she folded her hands and seemed to wait; something in the way she

smiled, satisfied one curiously. Nothing feminine ever expatiated less; she seemed to wish to listen chiefly, sometimes with a look of wistfulness, almost of timidity, or perhaps humility, which sat well on her. Although she never seemed anxious to speak, when she did speak in a soft, clear, deliberate voice, her talk showed no lack of spirit or of wit. Something in the quality of the girl brought tribute from every one. Dorothy would always be Dorothy, but she had lived so long abroad, her look, her movement, her way of meeting people, showed the influences of an older and more finished social world; that she had been trained not to assert her own claims to consideration, but, living among people and institutions which must be deferred to, she felt the pressure of standards and ideals which she must try to meet. Dorothy was, indeed, conventional enough to be startled when she found that she and I were to be alone in the house together.

"Oh, I shall chaperone you. I am quite old enough to chaperone you, and I shall chaperone you very closely, I assure you, Dorothy," I said.

"But, Marcia, you cannot go on living here all alone."

"At present you are here, and when I ask Jem Nicoll to dine with us your Aunt Hester shall come. I do not wish or intend to do anything to shock any one's sensibilities, but I could not possibly have a duenna. I live here alone, and

I intend to live here alone, and people will soon get used to it."

"Of course." There was a soft brilliant glance, a thoughtful nod, and a little folding of the lips.

"I am trying to find out how to live here in the best way," I went on explaining. "I long to re-establish the right sort of life for the old place, yet so far I do not try to define exactly what I want. Aunt Mary and Lilly both cry aloud, 'But how can you live there without any society?' What they mean by a lack of society is that they could not make up three tables of bridge here to save their lives. But then, I don't long to have three tables of bridge, even to have one. The more I have been in Aunt Mary's and Lilly's sort of society, the less I have cared for their sort of society; that is, the society which has to be gambled with, fed a dozen times a day, and set going from place to place on every sort of fast thing that moves. Not but that what I consider good society the best thing in the world."

"I'm always a little country body myself," the exquisite Dorothy now observed, "but from the time I was a child I always felt that in whatever you did, or said, or thought, there lurked always the pride of the aristocrat. We children all felt it. It swayed us all."

"I'm just so much of an aristocrat as this," I answered, "that to me there is not so very much difference between rich people and poor people.

I used to be poor, now I am better off. I acknowledge that the accident of riches alters conditions, but it does not alter the fact of character. To me the important thing is that a man or woman should be a good human being. A great many poor people are very fine human beings, and a great many rich people are the poorest sort of human beings."

"You will be able to do a great deal of good with your money here," mused Dorothy.

"I have not the smallest desire to pose as a benefactress. I wish to be interested in everything, and to live in absolute good-fellowship with everybody. I have a few fads, one of which is having good music in the churches, particularly good organ music, so that people may find going to church helpful and inspiring. Nothing is so inspiring or helpful as good music, and there is not a quarter enough good music in the world. Then, too, there is to be a library. I am already hard at work about the library."

"I can see that everybody in Swallowfield is delighted to have the old house open again. They are all proud that you kept the place, and that you have come back to settle down and live among them."

I was honestly glad to hear this, and I confessed to Dorothy that my ideal of a house was that it should be the centre of a community; that people should love to come to it, just as in Catho-

lic countries people drop in at church or cathedral on their way to and from everywhere, with the feeling as if it were the house of a friend.

"But I do hope, Marcia, that finally you will marry," said Dorothy.

"I shall never marry," I assured her quietly. Then when I saw pity and sorrow in her eyes I said, —

"Don't you remember that last year when we were here together as children, Dorothy, — the time just after my mother and father died?"

Oh, yes, Dorothy remembered.

"Well, then, at that time I seemed to keep myself alive by saying to myself, that one of these days I was going to be a rich woman, and would come back here to live just as my father wished me to live here. And now it has come to pass, come to pass wonderfully. I thank God morning and evening that my chance has come, and finally wisdom will come, and I shall know how to use my chance. The chief thing is to love one's life and one's work. So far I have loved all the work I ever set out to do. At college I loved to study, I loved it dearly; I even loved my work at Miss Keogh's. Then when I wrote, I wrote with love, and I shall love this finally."

"But, Marcia," cried Dorothy, her eyes kindling, her cheeks glowing, a bright spot burning on each cheek, "you must marry, for I want you

to have children. You never can be really happy unless you have children."

"No, it was never easy for me to be just simply happy. I shall not marry, I shall not have children, and probably I shall never be quite happy. But one's own little day is n't after all so very important, although it sometimes seems so. We get through it somehow, eating, drinking, trying to believe we are effectively doing great things in the world."

"It may not be anything wonderful," returned Dorothy, "but it is all that we have, our one little chance forevermore, and then if — if there are children, although we may be no longer in it, we know that they are to carry it on; that feeling makes life worth striving for."

Dorothy's words and her look and tone moved me. I was glad to feel that life beckoned to her; that she felt herself no mere bubble on the stream which runs to oblivion. Indeed, she was the most religious person I ever knew, and always said her prayers with the feeling that God would certainly grant them; and inevitably I think they were granted, because they were in accordance with the first and final laws of the universe.

All Swallowfield did come to the house, as if to the shrine of a patron saint, but it was Dorothy who drew them. I was quite contented. It was the same with them all as with Mr. Bevis. It is true he had said to Dorothy, —

"I am so sorry I did n't marry Marcia when she was poor, for now that she has turned out rich I shall never venture to offer myself to her; so I let the worm prey upon my damask cheek."

But all the time it was Dorothy whom Mr. Bevis actually adored. He constantly came to see her, pretending that he was looking after my garden. Another of Dorothy's worshipers was John Pearson, Miss Hester's man, who had, as he expressed it, "brought Dorothy up." He made errands over to see her twenty times a day. His wife, Jerusha, was constantly baking Dorothy the same cakes she used to love as a child; then if any fine strawberries ripened, of course Dorothy must eat them. Miss Hester's name might be dragged in to give plausibility to the little presents which were constantly showered upon Dorothy, but John Pearson simply could not be kept away. He was good enough to say to Dorothy that he thought I had the whole house looking just about right.

"I like taste in a house," he observed. "If a thing ain't taste-y I don't see that it has any place in a house. Now there's my daughter Jemima, what did she do, but buy a picture of the daughter of Herodias bringing in the head of John the Baptist on a charger. I said to her, 'Jemima, I don't think that's the sort of thing to buy and hang up. It ain't pleasant to look at. There's no taste in it for you or for Peter or for

your children.' So Jemima, who's a dabster, you know, with a paint brush, just with a few touches turned John the Baptist's head into a Christmas pudding with a bunch of holly on it; so that it looked quite cheerful to see the girl bringing it in. Now that's what I call taste."

John had no slight curiosity about Dorothy's experiences abroad. Had she ever seen the queen? Oh, yes, she had seen the queen. She told him about her experience of being presented at court.

"I snum," John confided to me later, "if I don't think Dorothy caught a trick or two from the queen. Don't you think there's something mighty fine about her, Miss Marcia?"

"Mighty fine, I think."

"I wonder if she's ever told you anything about her being likely to marry any dooks?"

"Why, no, not a word," I said, startled.

"Jerusha's got hold of the idea that there was somebody, a dook or a marquis or somebody," said John. "I should n't myself like to have her marry any dook."

"She has n't told me anything about a single duke," I replied.

It was Miss Hester who made it clear toward what these allusions tended. Dorothy had had several suitors, and to one of them had evidently inclined a little. This was Mr. Chevenix, a gentleman of good family, with expectations not only

of money, but of a title. He was not a young man; indeed, he was forty-four years old; and he was a shy man, rather awkward, and not particularly good looking. But he was a clever man with a rather brilliant career before him, and he had fallen deeply in love with Dorothy, had done his best to bring her to love him, and had offered himself at the end of last March. The trouble had been that Dorothy could not make up her mind whether to accept or refuse him. And Mrs. Clare was not sure whether she ought to help her to make up her mind, and had caught at the suggestion of her coming back to see her old friends, that she might understand more clearly where her inclinations lay.

All this interested me not a little. For singularly enough, when I told Gay that Dorothy had accepted my invitation, his reply had been, —

"Then she has n't made up her mind to marry that Englishman." He had said this with no little eagerness, but when I questioned him he would not commit himself further, simply said that he had heard she had many admirers, and that one of them had seemed to have a fair chance of winning her.

"But how did you find out all this?" I inquired with much surprise.

"Oh, Jem talks when he gets discouraged, and what troubles him leaks out."

"Oh, Jem!" I exclaimed with some disap-

pointment. "It just happened to occur to me, Gay, what a good idea it would be if you were to fall in love with Dorothy and marry her."

Gay touched my arm.

"Come now, Marcia, do you mean that you would like me to fall in love with Dorothy, and marry her if I could?"

"If ever a man deserved to be happy it is you, Gay, and Dorothy might make" —

"You will not marry me yourself!"

"But I don't wish to stand in the way of your happiness."

"Please not to be altruistic where I am concerned," said Gay. "If you will not give me happiness, I don't ask for happiness. Certainly not to be boxed up, tied with a blue ribbon, and given to your dearest friend to be consoled."

Gay had spoken in a way that inspired conviction, and then after a little pause he had added:

"And besides, there's Jem."

Thus I had made that tentative suggestion concerning Jem which Dorothy had passed over in silence. It was evidently no news to her that Jem was engaged in building an electric road toward Swallowfield, and was at present only twenty miles away.

I set to work to find out something about Mr. Chevenix.

"Of course in a great society one finds always a little coterie of congenial people, people whom

one really enjoys," I observed to Dorothy. "Please tell me about your particular set."

So finally I knew all that was to be told about Mr. Chevenix. Dorothy had been acquainted with him for three years. She had visited at his brother's great place, which was called Chevenix Park, and was intimate with his nieces. Nephews he had none, so was prospective heir to his brother's title. He was not handsome nor particularly brilliant in conversation, but had rather a delightful manner. He was very quiet; seemed to care really about what one had thought and said and done. He was not only well up in the world of politics, but seemed to know everything about books, and his way had been to bring Dorothy every volume he had thought she would like to read. And she did invariably like whatever he brought. He was in no way striking, but had a manner and tone and way with him which were peculiarly restful.

"Tell me, Dorothy," I demanded, "are you going to marry him?"

"That is what I don't know," said Dorothy.

"Do you love him?"

"I am not quite certain. I am only sure that it makes me very proud to feel that he cares about me."

"And he can give you a fine position."

A little sigh.

"They all say so."

"And is that enough?"

"I think it is a great deal," said Dorothy. "I think to be able to look up to a man who is strong and kind and clever, and who is easily given a first place among the very best people, is almost as much as a girl can ask."

I fully agreed with her. It seemed to me a beautiful thing for Dorothy to marry Mr. Chevenix, and finally to come into his brother's title, at least to have it worn by her son. I loved to think of her moving through that splendid world like the white flower she was.

She did not, however, ask any advice from me, and the utmost I could do in helping on Mr. Chevenix's suit was to put off a little sending for Jem to come and see her. However, Jem did not wait to be sent for. He walked in quietly one Saturday evening. He had come to spend Sunday with the Lees, he told me, and Herbert Lee was with him. Gay, poor fellow, was on the other side of the continent. It seemed to me rather clever of Jem to bring Herbert, who at once naturally and inevitably fell to my share, so that Jem could appropriate Dorothy. Appropriate is the word, for Mr. Bevis, who was visiting us, from the very moment the young men entered, closed his eyes and seemed to have fallen into a balmy slumber.

I could at least look at Jem and Dorothy, even

if I could not hear what they were talking about. It was three years now since they had met, and I could see that each observed the other closely, their eyes studying each other with the candor of children. Jem was rather pale, but his self-possession was extreme. Dorothy's manner was absolutely quiet and simple, and she listened with unhesitating attention to whatever he was telling her. Herbert Lee was used to talking to ladies, and piqued himself upon his power of interesting them, so held my ears occupied if not enthralled. But after the two young men had gone Dorothy told me everything that Jem had said. She remarked that she had enjoyed very much hearing about Jem's sisters, Tish and Peggy and Emily; it all seemed so pleasant and homelike.

"But Jem must be very clever, indeed," she added rather wistfully; "he seems to understand all about electrical railroads."

"I should suppose so. It would indeed be rather a pity if he did not, considering it is the occupation of his life to build them."

"It seems such a very unsettled kind of life," observed Dorothy.

"Oh, very."

"Crude, too."

"Very crude, indeed."

"I don't mean that Jem seemed to me crude," she added.

"Oh, no; Jem 's splendid, I think," I was as swift to say. "Jem is a force."

Mr. Bevis had waked up astonishingly by this time, and he told a good many stories about Jem; of how well Jem could manage men; of how triumphantly he had carried his work on in the face of an impending strike, and had finally contrived to avert it. Mr. Bevis also spoke about Jem's goodness to his sisters, also of his sense of responsibility toward his father, and Dorothy listened always with her air of serene meditation.

Jem sat behind us at church next day, and although I did not quite see how Dorothy could feel that his eyes were fixed on the back of her head, I could perceive that she did feel them. Perhaps her sure sense that his thoughts were not on the service roused her to a show of deeper devotion. When we came out she put her arm inside Miss Hester Bickerdyke's, and the two walked to my house together, for Miss Hester was to dine with us. I had invited Jem also. Jem was frankly interested in the house and place, which he had never actually seen before, and he left Dorothy to Miss Hester and Mr. Bevis, and went about with me. Then after the early Sunday dinner we sat out on the lawn not far from the cherry-trees where the cherries were ripening, and where all the birds came to peck at them. Miss Hester always went to a neighbor's house to read the Bible on Sunday afternoon to a sick

friend. Jem walked with her there, and when he came back he sat down by me. Dorothy, at a little distance, was sitting on a bench with Mr. Bevis. She almost invariably wore white; it was her affectation, her fancy, her fad. To-day she had on a dress of the sheerest white muslin, and her laces, her ribbons, her stockings, her shoes were white. I should not have blamed Jem if so fair a picture as she made had drawn his eyes. What I admired in him was a certain thoroughness with which he devoted himself to me, almost as if Dorothy were not present. It evinced, I thought, no little pluck and resolution in the young fellow. All at once, however, he made it clear where his thoughts were, where his heart was. For Dorothy had suddenly uttered a faint exclamation. A cherry, a little over-ripe, had dropped on her white muslin frills, evidently lost out of the beak of a bird flying overhead. It had made a slight stain. A stain on Dorothy's whiteness! Jem was at her feet in a moment; on his knees with his handkerchief at her service.

"'Out damned spot,'" exclaimed Mr. Bevis, jumping up. Lady Macbeth herself could not have rubbed harder than did Jem.

Mr. Bevis crossed at once to me; took Jem's seat beside me, leaving all the field and all the favor to the younger man. He talked to me for an hour; talked conscientiously, industriously, indefatigably; he even insisted on my turning

my chair half way round, offering my back to the young people; ostensibly to catch a certain trick of light on the rose arbor. Transparent as the ruse was I accepted it. I might be half in favor of the English suitor who had so much to offer Dorothy, still Jem should have his chance. I felt, indeed, that Jem knew how to make the most of each little rift of opportunity. The afternoon went on, the shadows stretched longer and longer; Mr. Bevis was evidently getting sleepy, but he still continued to talk like the seven sages of Greece.

"Marcia," said Jem, suddenly breaking in upon the steady stream, "Dorothy says she will walk down to the river with me if you are willing to go with us."

Of course I was willing to go, but I saw that Mr. Bevis wavered. I was sure he was thinking with longing of a certain comfortable Morris chair in the library, and I bade him go seek it.

"But," he murmured, "I want poor old Jem to have a good walk with Dorothy."

"He shall have it, don't be afraid."

"He has to be back at his work early tomorrow," pleaded Mr. Bevis.

"He shall not know that I am within a mile of them," I said, "but Dorothy will know, and it will make her more comfortable."

Mr. Bevis yielded gracefully. We three set out, Jem holding a white parasol over Dorothy.

I told them frankly that I was tired of talking, besides, I said that I never did love to talk going down that lane. Too many thoughts buzzed there and took possession of me. I walked on, and they followed beneath the white umbrella. I had had a glimpse of the two young faces framed in the lunette it made, and I longed to look again, but as I walked on I sang softly to myself, —

> "It was a beauteous lady richly dressed,
> Around her neck a chain of jewels rare."

I was still crooning Allan Percy when we came to the river: —

> "Though a proud earl be father to my child,
> Yet on the sward my blessed babe shall lie."

I sat down on the side of the bridge to have my song out. They came up presently with their beautiful, happy, animated faces. Dorothy had been telling Jem some of her childish adventures along this lane, and it was clear that the dialogue between them was keen, intimate, and full of mischief.

"Oh, but you are tired, Marcia," Dorothy murmured, on observing that I was sitting down.

"Did you wish to go farther?"

"I promised to show Jem the spring."

"By all means go on to the spring, and I will follow when I have rested a little."

Perhaps I loitered on the bridge longer than I intended, for the sweet of the afternoon was particularly sweet here. The sound of the water lulled me, and the murmur of the bees in the willows and the swish of the drooping branches in the river helped to give rhythm to the sound. Then there were gleams of sunshine across the pastures, and a trick of effect where the blue sky was reflected in the water where the river made a bend, which I kept longing to catch once more. It was not until I had had my fill of enjoyment of the lovely hour that I let my conscience wake up, and I said to myself that I had promised to follow Dorothy and Jem. I rose reluctantly; I looked down at the water, I looked across at the pastures, I took a step away. No task could be more ungrateful than to have to leave this quiet and serenity and toil across that long stretch of the upper meadow after two young people who were very far from needing me. Still I did continue to advance a few steps; I was almost beyond the willow-tree when what did I see already coming across the field? Surely Dorothy, and surely Jem. But Dorothy was in advance, hatless, and the sunshine was lighting up her hair with a golden glory. Behind her, carrying the white umbrella, also the white hat with white ribbons, was Jem. They looked like two children who had quarreled; both paled and burned at once; both had their

lips curved down at the corners; both were speechless; both showed eyes whose light was a little quenched; Dorothy's by tears, Jem's because he kept his eyelids shut down close.

"I was just coming after you," I called lamely. I could not easily suit any phrase to such an occasion.

"Let us go back, please," said Dorothy with plenty of decision. She had put her hand through my right arm, and I could feel that she was trembling all over. Indeed, it seemed to me that I could almost hear her heart beat. Jem came on my left, cutting a droll figure shading himself with the white parasol like a Chinese mandarin, and carrying the hat with the utmost nicety. He explained to me, when we reached the house, that he had not recollected he had kept the umbrella, but that was neither here nor there; Dorothy, no doubt, did know, but this pulsing, blushing, paling, ardent creature could not stop for such trifles. She longed to be at home, to hide herself; we were breathless in keeping up with her. I made some effort to cover the embarrassed silence by offering a few remarks. I tried to interest Jem by saying that I wished and intended to build a stone bridge with a beautiful arch over the little river we all loved so well. But these two young people did not halt for bridges; their thoughts were cleaving space; reaching up to heaven, perhaps down to hell. The moment we

were in sight of the house, Dorothy, with a murmured word of excuse, shot from me like an arrow.

I could see in Jem's honest eyes that in spite of courage and to spare he was looking at me timidly.

"But what is all this about?" I now demanded with the air of an experienced chaperone who finds herself put all in the wrong.

"I am afraid," murmured poor Jem, "I am afraid I have a bold way with a lady." His eyes were full of gloom, and the corners of his lips curved down. He mused upon his misdeeds in silence for a moment, then added: "Too bold a way, perhaps."

"I am very sorry," I felt it my duty to say with some touch of severity. "I should not have expected you, Jem, to do anything you would have to repent."

"Oh, no, I don't repent," said Jem. He looked at me with intense seriousness. "Don't think, Marcia, that I repent. And if you speak to Dorothy about it, don't tell her that I repented."

"Oh, I don't know about saying anything to Dorothy. Dorothy is very complete in herself."

"Is n't she?" murmured Jem. His admiration for that completeness burst from him in a deep sigh. "It was partly that," he now explained to me confidentially, "she looked somehow so beautiful, so dedicated, so set apart that

I" — His own thought apparently finished the sentence to his own satisfaction. "Not but that I like to have her look just so," he went on after a little pause. "I think it the most perfect thing in the world. But if I were to show her that I accepted the fact that she is dedicated, set apart, throned high above me, and that I made no claim, I should be nowhere!" Then again he burst out: "I don't want her to pity me; I'd rather she scorned me."

"I am very much in the dark as to what it all means," I now observed.

"I suppose so," he returned with demureness. "She may tell you if she likes. I could n't. It is quite out of the question."

Dorothy came down an hour later looking pale and serious. I gave her Jem's excuses. He was sorry not to bid her good-by, but he had to go away by the seven o'clock train.

Her pallor had not lasted beyond the mention of that name.

"Don't say anything about Jem," she exclaimed, all aflame with the fire of her indignation. "I am very much displeased with Jem."

"Why, Dorothy," I replied conciliatingly, "I cannot possibly think that Jem would willfully have done anything which he supposed might displease you."

She was all of a quiver.

"Not suppose it would displease me? How he could have thought," she faltered, "how he could have dared to think that I" — Then she made a pitiful effort to command herself. "I suppose it must seem very strange to you, Marcia, but" — She broke off quite helpless.

I waited meekly. I knew that she wanted to tell me. I knew that she longed to test the thing, whatever it was, by my perceptions.

"Try to take it more quietly, Dorothy," I suggested. "Try to think it over, and try to forgive him and calm down."

"I could n't take it quietly. I could n't forgive him. I thought I stayed up in my room until I had calmed down a little." She came up to me with her brown eyes shining, her lovely red lips quivering. "Why, Marcia," she leaned down, and whispered into my ear, "*he — he kissed me.*"

"Without your permission?" I demanded with proper indignation.

"Without my permission?" she repeated with intense solemnity. "My permission? He had no thought of asking my permission. He had said nothing about it, not a word. I had been telling about some French pictures I had once seen at an exhibition, and I spoke of a Daubigny which had put me in mind of the spring. I was trying to describe it to him. There had not been a syllable, not the least hint of anything, I had no thought of — of any sort of danger" —

"How extraordinary of Jem," I said with severity. "Had he not looked at you? Had he not" —

"Yes," she yielded meekly; "he had been looking at me, and I do think, Marcia, that he has terribly bold eyes." She faltered and trembled at the thought of them. "I may have felt," she went on delicately, "all the time we were together that — that we were old friends, and that — perhaps — he — had a sort of — but cannot one be an old friend, and yet — I tell you, Marcia, there was no sort of preparation! It just came!"

"I consider it very shocking, very," I said. "I myself feel aggrieved, Dorothy. I intended to chaperone you beautifully. I only" —

"I wonder what he thinks of me? I wonder what he thinks I am used to," cried Dorothy.

"You mean that he does not appreciate the fact that you belong to a different world altogether; that you are used to finished, elegant men who show their admiration for you in a very different sort of way. Now Mr. Chevenix, for example, would never be guilty of such audacity."

"Mr. Chevenix? Never! He would die first. Mr. Chevenix is always perfectly quiet and agreeable in his manners. He never — never — the idea of Mr. Chevenix, — he has the highest respect for me."

"Dear Dorothy, you need n't doubt Jem's having the most worshiping respect for you. Perhaps the very fact that he feels himself a little outside of your life made him long to plant himself visibly before your mind. When a man, a young man like Jem, that is, is in love, I suppose he is apt to be a little imperious in his love-making. But he had better not be too imperious in making love to Miss Dorothy Deane."

"No," she said at first with decision, then blushed and wavered. "No!"

CHAPTER XXV

I LOVING FREEDOM AND UNTRIED

When Dorothy comes in one longs for the moment to linger and appeals to time, "Stay, for thou art so fair."

But the rest of my story must move on swiftly.

Many visitors came and went through the summer, and in September the Chesters spent a whole week with me. Many times I seemed to see in Grace's eyes thoughts which she did not utter, but at last, when she was going away, she did speak out.

"To think that Paul can never see you here! That instead of his being a cousin, a friend, he has made himself your enemy!"

"I hope not my enemy," I returned; "for certainly I am no enemy of Paul's."

"You have forgiven him, then? You are the most generous woman alive."

"Oh, as to forgiving, I know nothing of forgiving. I may not feel that I have anything to forgive. Life goes on; everything changes. What one has regarded with feeling at one time, one looks at afterward calmly and indifferently."

"Could you endure to meet Paul? Might he come to see you?"

"If he wishes to come, I should like to see him."

I had a certain satisfaction in saying this, in making it clear to Grace, and to Mr. Chester, perhaps also to Paul, that there was no ghost of a buried past in my life; nothing that I dared not look in the face.

And so early in October Paul came.

He had written a few words from a country house at Lenox, where he was staying with some friends, that he should like to call on Tuesday on his way back to New York, unless I found it inconvenient to receive him. Accordingly next day when, as I was picking dahlias, I saw some one alighting at the gate, out of an automobile that smoked and snorted like the car of Pluto, I walked straight down the steps, and held out my hand.

"So Jean is not with you," I said.

His keen glance rested on me a moment.

"Did you expect her?"

"Very naturally, although you did not allude to her. How is she? I hope that she is well."

"She landed in New York four days ago, and is busy rehearsing. To tell the truth," here he smiled, "I have not seen Jean for three months. We parted in London, at the beginning of July. She was just starting for Aix. I detest those places

where everybody is talking about their particular cure. I never go to them. Jean has her career, you know: I am a mere outsider in her life. She is just now very much absorbed in the new play which is to be tried Monday night."

We had shaken hands, and now were walking slowly up the path to the steps before the house. There are things we cannot know until they have come to pass; feelings not to be forecast before they are experienced. I was glad to see Paul. He was a cousin, a friend; it was pleasant to feel that he might still be part of my life. I looked at him with a certain curiosity to discover what these six years had done for him. He had grown a little older; his face was fuller, and now that he had thrown off the heavy tweed motoring coat with capes, I saw that he was considerably stouter. But the old unquenchable light was in his blue eyes still, and his smiling manner had all the old sympathetic quality. As we reached the paved terrace before the entrance to the house now set round with blossoming chrysanthemums, he stopped short.

"How bright, how pleasant it all is," he said. "You are splendidly set, and it suits you so well. Marcia, I was so glad, — I was so honestly glad and proud to have it all happen."

"What, my coming here to live?"

"Of course I recall perfectly how you always believed that you were to come here finally."

He said he remembered everything so well, and glanced about with so much interest, I asked him if he would like to walk round the place before we went in to lunch. Accordingly we went up the terrace to the side walk, and along the arbor path to the stables. I had three horses by this time, one a mare, a beautiful creature called Missy, carefully chosen for me by Jem Nicoll, Mr. Bickerdyke, and Mr. Bevis.

Paul looked at me with peculiar earnestness, as I pointed out Missy.

"Ah, you ride," he said.

"Very often, although at present I drive chiefly, for I have a friend staying with me."

"I had wondered if I should find you alone."

"I am rarely alone."

"Of course, of course."

For the first time I seemed to experience a certain childish sense of joy in my possessions. I had been apt to say that it was only when I was poor that I was proud, and now that I was well off I had become humble. To-day I was very proud, as I confided to Paul, that I had also two beautiful Alderneys in the pasture.

"Tell me something," said Paul stopping suddenly, as we were walking toward the garden. "How did the news of your being rich again come to you? Was it a surprise, or had it been a gradual expectation?"

I told him the whole story of Gay's long and

arduous work, of his keeping me wholly in the dark about the operations going on; then of the coming of the three men on that March day to bring me the offer for the mine.

"That was always a clever youngster, that young Lee," said Paul. His eyes traveled over my face as he said this. Then he added with a little sigh, "You must have been very happy in the good news."

"On the contrary, it seemed to me at first like an impertinent interruption. I longed and expected to make a fortune myself. I had already laid up several thousand dollars."

We both laughed.

"This is better. You were born to be a great lady. The stage was set; the scene laid; all you had to do was to walk on like a well-graced actor. You know the part, and it becomes you. One can see at a glance that you feel entirely at home here."

"It had always been a dream, and now it has come true. That is all. I am getting used to it."

We had reached the flower garden. I had told Paul that Mr. Bevis and I were to begin on the morrow, and spend three days every week setting out bulbs. We were to plant five thousand of different kinds.

"To come up and blossom in the spring," he said meditatively. Then after a little pause added, "And so Mr. Bevis comes."

"Constantly."

Paul gave me a laughing glance. "After all I was right. It was old Bickerdyke, instead of Bevis, with whom Miss Keogh was in love."

"My idea about Mr. Bevis possibly wishing to marry Miss Keogh, or any woman, was one of my blunders."

"One of your blunders? I feel as if you had never made a blunder."

"I have made thousands of blunders."

"There are blunders and blunders," observed Paul. "Some are remediable, others are irremediable."

I was interested in telling him about the breaking up of that first part of my New York life; of the final distribution of the collection; of how it had been parted into lots and sent East, West, North, and South. He had been familiar with my life at Miss Keogh's, and I knew he would understand that, however alien and unapproachable many of the objects of the collection had seemed to me at first, I had finally grown to love them; that I hated to part with them, and day by day, when the change came, they seemed to look at me imploringly, and to plead with me not to be sent away. I told him, too, that no new possessions of mine were quite as dear as the twelve great jars of blue dragon china which Miss Keogh had given me as a parting present. Six of these were open, and six were closed for rose jars,

and Dorothy and I had filled them in June with a potpourri of damask roses.

"I will show them to you presently," I said.

Paul had heard about the Bickerdykes and their "village settlement," as it was called. For of course the enterprise had been so successful it was by this time well known, and had been described and illustrated in papers and periodicals over and over again. But I told him that Miss Keogh was becoming less and less of an humanitarian, and chiefly cared nowadays about Mr. Bickerdyke, and that as soon as they had put all their institutions into thoroughly good working order they intended to come to Swallowfield to live.

It seemed easy, natural, inevitable to tell Paul everything, and he showed his interest in all I said, answering with taste, delicacy, discretion; with no suggestion of too much emphasis, with no desire to create any impression.

I was telling him about the Bickerdykes while we crossed the orchard, where many of the trees hung heavy with their bright glossy fruit. We mounted the hill, and Paul said he liked the view of the woods and river and pastures all held within the rim, as it were, of a lapis-lazuli cup, for to-day the mountains were of the richest blue. Then nearer to us the trees were resplendent in every color, while above was a great sky all sunshine and luminous azure.

"Not even Hamlet could question here whether 'to be, or not to be,'" Paul said as if in a dream. "Yes, one might live here."

Then we went back to the house after our ramble, and in to lunch and to Dorothy.

I had told Dorothy quietly that Paul Chauncey might call on his way back to New York. She had taken in the information with a certain quick glance at me, but had made no remark, except that she had always had a certain curiosity to see what Jean Darcy's husband was like. A singular bond had always existed between Jean and Dorothy. Upon the chaos of Jean's early life, Dorothy had shone like a guiding star. So perhaps it was natural that Dorothy should unhesitatingly address Paul on the subject of his wife, whom she had met in London in the spring. I had never before known that Dorothy could pose, but to-day she posed as the old friend of Jean. I confess that as I had already planted the ghost of Jean between Paul and me, it struck me in my capacity of hostess as being too much of a coincidence that Dorothy should meet him with just that confident sureness of touch, as if he were to her simply Jean's husband. A touch, indeed, which, though delicate, was so sure that in Paul's knitted forehead I could perceive that it was almost too sure, too confident, too close.

Nevertheless, he met Dorothy simply and

frankly on the same ground that she had chosen, and Jean was the theme we all played on, touching every sort of chord all through the meal. I fancy, indeed, that, after the first recoil, Paul found that the subject freed him from a certain kind of awkwardness; that it perhaps enabled him to define himself and his ideas more clearly than it might have been possible for him to do otherwise.

Dorothy had made the remark that in going to the theatre to see an old friend on the stage, she had expected at every turn to be reminded of the familiar personality. But no; she had never seen any one who so perfectly sustained the illusion of her part as did Jean; not a single look, intonation, or movement but belonged to the rôle she was playing. Yet all she did seemed to be absolutely spontaneous.

"I never go to see her now," said Paul. "But they tell me that she improves constantly, — that she acts very cleverly indeed."

"Do you not even go to see her in a new part?" inquired Dorothy.

"As I said, I never go to see her now."

"Have you no curiosity about her in her fresh triumphs?" continued Dorothy.

Paul gave a little laugh which suggested quiet amusement.

"Any possible curiosity is apt to be gratified," he said; "Jean could not act as she does without

incessant study, without trying the least detail of effect upon some sort of audience. Successful actress though she is, she is good enough to value my criticism still, and if I am within her reach, I am pretty sure to be obliged to know her parts by heart quite as well as she does. But I never go into a theatre nowadays. I have come to dislike the theatre; possibly because I am pointed out as 'Miss Darcy's husband.'" He laughed again.

"Of course you would be pointed out as Jean's husband," said Dorothy so sweetly that I saw Paul shoot at her a swift, half-suspicious glance; then reassured by the calm of her lovely eyelids, the sweetness of the indrawn lips, and the grace of the slim folded hands, he listened attentively to what Dorothy went on to say. "Of course I always knew that Jean had an arch, mobile face, but I could never have supposed she would turn out such a beautiful woman. The very irregularity of her features seems to add to the charm of her face. She gave me a collection of her photographs. They are so interesting."

"She photographs very well," replied Paul calmly; evidently taking his courage in his two hands. "Altogether there must be several hundred of her pictures. I never look into an illustrated paper nowadays, I am so afraid of meeting her portrait somewhere. I cannot so well avoid the posters; they are a perpetual nightmare.

It is a very curious experience, this being married to a famous actress. I should recommend it as an antidote to a passion for the stage. I myself began with a passion for everything connected with the theatre. I used to be under the glamour of gaslights, limelights, electric lights, of anything that could create illusion. Everything behind the footlights drew me with the most inexplicable allurement. It is quite over now. I love only daylight, sunlight."

He had said this to Dorothy, now he transferred his vivid glance to me. "I might have my occasional moment of glory," he observed, "that is, I mean when Jean plays Corisande. Then I might have a chance to be pointed out as 'the author;' the man who wrote the play by his one single flash of genius, and whose torch then expired as if dipped in the sea."

His look sought mine for a moment with a curious intensity of expression, then his eyelids dropped and his whole face changed.

"Jean told me," Dorothy continued relentlessly, "how she was always hoping that some day you would give her another part which she might love to play as well as she loves to play Corisande."

"Never," said Paul. "I hate the stage, and should prefer never to think of the theatre again. I have gone back to my own profession, and make the most of whatever work I can get. I

am thankful to have a profession of my own, and work of my own to go back to."

The meal was over; we had left the table, and had gone into the library.

"Do you expect to stay here through the winter?" Paul now asked me.

"Oh, yes, certainly. So far I have lived out of doors, but I like the feeling that winter is coming, and will presently shut me up inside the four walls."

He walked about examining every picture, every piece of furniture. I showed him one of the old mahogany escritoires in the room in which, only yesterday, I had discovered a secret drawer. He was very much interested in the ingenious handwork of the old desk. He was curious about everything; took up one book after another that lay on the table, glanced at its title, and asked if I had read it, then finally stood for a long time before the row of photographs which hung along the wall by the fireplace.

"Do you often see Felix Rose?" he inquired suddenly, when he came upon his picture.

"From time to time."

"Does he come here?"

"Oh, yes, he has been here several times."

"I can imagine that every road leads to Swallowfield nowadays," Paul said almost with brusqueness; then looked at his watch, remarked

that he had to take the four o'clock train, shook hands with us, and went away.

When he had left us, Dorothy and I remained standing just where we were when he had said adieu. All her boldness was gone; that poise of the head which she had carried all through luncheon, that magnificent habit of society, that provocation of her wide, open gaze, all changed into timid hesitation. Even the corners of her lovely mouth turned down as she drew nearer to me with the air of a culprit.

"Why do you look at me so, Marcia?" she pleaded.

I laughed.

"Why do you look at me so?"

"I know what you mean," she faltered with a sort of desperate courage, "but I wanted him to remember Jean. I wanted you to remember Jean."

"Am I likely to forget her?"

"But I want you to remember her as the woman he has married; who loves him, and to whom he is necessary."

"I have wondered if she really ever did love him," I said. "That soft, pretty, cat-like creature liked to play with him, I knew that. But why have you never told me a word about your having seen her?"

"I was always ready to tell you if you wished to hear," said Dorothy.

We sat down side by side on the deep comfortable sofa. It was a long story. Dorothy had gone to the theatre to see Jean as Corisande, and Jean had recognized her as she sat in the box near the stage, and had sent her a note then and there, asking her to come to her hotel the next day at two o'clock, and lunch with her. Mrs. Clare had accompanied Dorothy. They found Jean luxuriously established in her own suite of rooms, exquisitely dressed, and she had presided at a delicately ordered meal beautifully served. Afterward Jean had talked as Jean could talk with wit, grace, abandon, each nuance of meaning brought out with plenty of wit, charm, and malice. She was completely happy in her stage life, she told Dorothy; it was not merely that she was successful, it was that she had room to live, and to expand her powers; she could be prodigal of herself yet not feel herself frittered away in ineffectual pieces. While she talked she herself made coffee for them in a curious Eastern fashion, and while she sipped hers, had smoked cigarette after cigarette. She had been so pretty, so elegant, so dainty, and her whole personal equipment was on such a scale of lavish extravagance that Mrs. Clare had, like the good, wise, far-seeing woman she was, argued against the artificiality of the life; had agreed to its possible fascinations, but had deplored its sure temptations. "Oh, it costs," Jean acknowledged, "it

costs." But the managers had to count up her value, and were generally willing to pay down the price. She was always in debt, always behindhand, of course; but in her profession one had to be prodigal, lavish; prodigality was one's very breath; it was one's inspiration.

"As to temptations," as she said this, Jean had snapped her fingers. "No temptation counts more than that. Paul taught me everything; as an actress I owe everything to Paul; I was madly in love when I married him, and I have never had time to get up any other passion. I don't even hanker for one. Daily life is too importunate. One has constantly to will and to do. Also one has to rest a great deal, and to keep young and pretty. Then there are the newspapers, one must read what the critics say; and, above all, the clothes are a part of the feverish existence that never slackens. Everything else is the mere débris that belongs to the rush of life day by day. I forget in a minute that people exist."

Dorothy dropped all this story into my ear, dwelling upon certain effects of Jean's toilette, and of the exquisite furnishings of her room. She was entirely at home in her life, Dorothy said, and it answered readily every demand her nature made upon it. She loved her art, and so far it completely absorbed her.

I listened quietly. To me all this experience to-day had been like the opening of a door long

kept barred and bolted. Now the door stood wide open, and I had a certain curiosity to see what had been on the other side.

"Of course," Dorothy added after a little pause, "I had never seen Mr. Chauncey until to-day."

"Tell me what you thought of him."

"When I looked at him it made me love Jem. May I tell you why?" said Dorothy. Then without waiting for my permission she went on with soft vehemence. "Because I see that one man may love a woman so simply, so frankly, so humbly that he is thinking all the time of her; that he rises out of himself into his wish to please her; to serve her; to try to make her happy." She paused, and our eyes met with an instantaneous flash as she added, "That is like Jem, that is like Gay."

"Of course it may be like Jem," I remarked, "but what do you know about Gay?"

"I know a great deal," said Dorothy. "And I know that while the kind of man like Jem and Gay can love generously, another kind of man can only love selfishly, with something like elaborate cruelty to a woman in the way he goes straight to the end he prefers at the cost of no matter what pain to others."

I felt that Dorothy was a wise little woman, and I told her so, but then she had had both Mr. Chevenix and Jem to study.

"All those questions are over for me," I went on. "I am not in love with anybody. Nothing could induce me to be in love with anybody. Once I was in love with somebody, but there came a few days and a few nights of disillusion, when my love burned up and was gone forever."

Still even while I spoke I was conscious of that wide open door, and of seeing, as in a dream, moving in the half strange, half real life now disclosed, two people who once had been very real and familiar.

CHAPTER XXVI

BUT WHO CAN TAKE A DREAM FOR A TRUTH?

Dorothy sailed for England toward the last of October. Early in the month we had had beautiful weather, then came a frost, followed by rain and gray days, and heavy moonless nights. But on the evening of the twenty-eighth a light had run round the edge of the clouds at sunset, and next morning the dawn broke fair, although behind mists which partly hid the sun until toward ten o'clock. Then all at once it was a day of soft, wonderful brightness. I decided to go on a long ride, and told Simeon to bring round the horses and to be ready to go with me. I was descending the stairs in my riding habit when the front door, swinging wide in response to a touch at the bell, disclosed the figure of Paul Chauncey.

"Why, you are going out," he exclaimed as if we had met the day before. "I came to ask if you would ride with me."

There was not much to say. Of course we could ride together.

"You will not need the man," said Paul. "I think I am competent to look after you."

"Oh, Simeon must come," I answered; "he has the bag of sandwiches for my lunch."

So we set out; Simeon and I mounting at the side door, and Paul joining us at the gate. We walked our horses soberly along the village street.

"I hope you are not displeased with me," Paul said.

"Displeased? No, I was very much surprised to see you."

"But why should n't we have a ride together?"

"Why, indeed? But I cannot imagine where you came from. You seem to have dropped from the clouds."

"I have," Paul returned with nonchalance, "so please accept me as Heaven-sent."

Once off the village street with its three churches, its shops, its rows of houses, its knots of people standing at corners and passing to and fro, we struck the quiet country road.

"Of course, as you see, I don't ride well yet," I remarked to Paul. "I am always a bungler to begin with; but by dint of resolution and hard work I improve."

He looked me over critically, dropped a word or two about the way I held the reins, and told me to sit a little farther forward on the saddle. In an instant I found the advantage of his advice. It was just what I needed. We talked about horses, and it came out that he had obtained his from a stable at M——, three miles away.

"When I saw yesterday that the weather was clearing," he said, "I determined to have a ride with you to-day. I left New York at seven o'clock this morning."

Although the early mists were gone, they had left behind a touch of pearly haze which invested all the landscape with a wonderful delicacy of color. Most of the trees had lost more than half their leaves, but what remained seemed enough to set off the outline of trunk and branches with a surer picturesqueness, and every leaf had been washed in tints at once vivid and transparent. The yellows were of the most wonderful luminous quality, and held all the ardor of the sunshine. The reds were like the flush of rose and ruby that comes at sunrise and sunset, and the blue that deepened overhead into the vast dome of the sky, which as we rode on seemed to stretch wider and wider into remote horizons, was the most exquisite and translucent blue that was ever seen.

Here and there along the road and over the fields so many leaves had fallen they made a perfect mosaic of red and gold, and everything that held color burned with gem-like intensity.

"We seem to be going straight toward the hills," said Paul.

"We are," I answered.

Simeon, mounted on old Toby, — too well worked to be ambitious, — could hardly keep

up with us, for Missy, at first shy and coquettish, with little tosses of the head, prickings up of her ears, and with a generous display of all her favorite naughtinesses, had soon come to enjoy having Paul's big black horse at her right, and straining her every nerve and muscle seemed to offer him a challenge of speed, which he accepted, putting forth his best mettle. We rode on as if flying for a while, then at the beginning of a long hill dropped our reins, and let the animals take whatever pace they would. I was glad of the chance to look about me, for every inch of the roadside was exquisite; not a tangle of blackberry vine but had all the beauty of a finished picture; the seed vessels of the wild clematis which they call Traveler's Joy made arabesques along the fences, and here and there catching some support above on bush or tree hung against the sky like the most delicate lace-work.

Paul spoke suddenly.

"The world is beautiful to you?"

"Yes."

"All these golden and crimson and purple flourishes do not look to you like some conscious work of art, — do not suggest tawdry stage scenery? No? Then you have lost none of your illusions."

"I never had any. I was brought up to face remorseless facts."

"There are so many things I am curious to

know about you. So many questions concerning you constantly besiege my mind. For example, I have wondered if you will go on writing?"

"No."

"Is nothing to come of all that passionate desire for expression?"

"I have other ways of expressing myself. With a house, a garden, all sorts of live things besides all the village people to look after, I cannot afford to give my thoughts to an unreal world."

"You wish me to understand that your present life satisfies you completely?"

"Well, why not?"

"Well, yes, why not? But the grim fact remains that one is not too easily satisfied." He said this almost savagely, then went on in a different tone, "But then, how little I know about your life, your real life; about your thoughts as you go about your place, and as you sit quietly looking into the fire. Even at this moment I cannot tell what is in your mind; what you see before you, taking it in with that wide, calm glance!"

"I see a straight road leading, I am not quite sure where. I was wondering if we should take the next turn to the left, or keep straight on. I must wait and ask Simeon."

I turned and waited for Simeon to come up, and did ask him. I could see that Paul took the

opportunity to look at me closely, and when I was ready to go on he smiled at me.

"Marcia," he began at once, "when you came down the steps the other day, in that white wool frock, it seemed to me that you had not changed in the least, as if you were the very same frank, royal, splendid child you were when I first saw you, almost just there, eight years ago. But to-day, in this dark blue riding habit, you seem to me calm, regal, rather languid. I don't completely make you out."

He had taken exactly the old intimate tone, and I had to confess that I found in him no little of the old charm, the charm that drew and held as the result of his whole personality. It was not only in his look and tone, but in the way he listened and gathered in the meaning of what I said and the idea of what was behind it. Also in the way he spoke and made me listen to him and take in his meaning.

"Ever since I saw you the other day I have been restless," he now told me. "Seeing you gave me clear facts, color, movement; added statistics, all sorts of odds and ends of meaning that I had longed to get hold of. So many recollections came back to my mind and took possession of me. Cannot you imagine that there are a thousand things I need to explain?"

I looked straight at Paul.

"No," I answered. "I sufficiently under-

stand everything. I need to have nothing explained."

"You have no curiosity, then, about the past?"

"Not in the least."

"The past does not exist for you?"

"No."

"So be it, then," he said. He took off his cap and waved it. "So be it. Let us whistle it down the wind." Then he added, "That is, you can afford to whistle it down the wind. You can rub away the past as a sponge washes a slate. Still, I doubt if even you can forget everything. For instance,"—I met a laughing gleam in his eye, I raised my hand with a sort of deprecating gesture, but he went on,—"you have n't forgotten about our writing that play together, Marcia! You cannot think with what intense interest I have read everything else that you have written."

"I am sorry for you," I replied, "for some of the things I wrote must have been very bad indeed."

"Not a word but what was struck off from the fire that burns in you. Half a dozen times I longed to tell you that I should like to use one of your plots. For again and again you gave me just the touch I needed. In fact, I always needed your fire, your glow, your passion. Without you all I did was cold and lifeless. Together we were splendidly successful."

What he had said was something I could not

ignore. It compelled my attention, but it also roused my antagonism.

"We ought to have written many a play together," he now said.

I looked at him for a moment in silence, then remarked quietly: —

"I was glad to hear that you were working hard at your profession. Tell me about Grace."

We had reached the top of the hill, and felt the keen sweet wind in our faces. As I spoke Paul checked his horse, turned him halfway round, and faced the landscape behind us as if in deep thought. Missy, tired of the slow climb, drank in the wind and panted to be off. I gave her the rein and let her have the whole joy of her sudden spurt. She tore on, and did not slacken until we had gained a mile or more, and it was only when she began to tire that Paul was able to overtake us.

"Tell me about Grace," I said again. "Are they still at Marshmallows?"

He told me a good deal about Grace, saying that she and the children counted for more and more with him. He had no domestic life, he explained; that was out of the question. When Jean was in New York it was his way to take a suite of rooms at the Waldorf. She had many requirements; could not be contented with anything less than the most incredible luxury.

"I am not rich enough, I never could be rich

enough," he went on, "to offer her a household which could begin to come up to her wishes. Marcia," he broke out suddenly, almost with passion, "if a man likes to taste the bitter dregs of humiliation, let him marry a woman with a career to which everything on earth must be sacrificed. What old pagan was it who, when he wished to become a Christian, was told by the priest that in order to be baptized he must burn what he used to worship, and worship what he used to burn? I, at any rate, have gone through that change of heart. I used to think I cared for nothing but artistic perfection; nowadays I am ready to say I hate all art; that at any sign of art I feel disgust, suspicion, hatred. Above all, I hate all personal luxury. I hate all the endless elaboration of effort to keep young and beautiful. The body becomes a god, and insists upon what it shall eat, what it shall drink, what it shall do in order that it may be sleek, well fed, seductive, insolently well, and laugh at the idea of being sick or sorry or repentant or unhappy. It is only by hating the false that I have come to love what is true."

He had spoken with impatience, almost with fury; he had drawn so near me that our horses almost touched, and he leaned nearer still as he now went on:—

"When I saw you walking beside me the other day in the bright, frank sunshine, without a hat, careless of the wind, which blew your hair into

little curls around your forehead and temples, I said to myself, 'What a man loves in a woman is that she is like daylight, like sunlight, like the free wind that blows from heaven.'"

He stopped a moment, looked straight into my face, and then spoke again:—

"You see, I had an unsatisfied sense of longing for adventure; I wanted experience. I went blindly into the lottery. I have not, Heaven knows, drawn a blank. And if I desired experience I have had it. And for me it is defeat, failure, everything precious spoiled and gone to waste, which is experience."

The line of low mountains which we had almost reached began to impress their blueness with a certain insistency upon the landscape, as if they made an insurmountable barrier in our path. A rich fruity smell hung in the air. It came from a cider mill where apples, red, yellow, and green, were piled in bright masses. The farmer who was at work came out, and gave us each a cup of the juice fresh from the press to drink. We dismounted here, and left our horses with Simeon, for the climb before us was too steep to permit of its being used as a bridle path. I had taken the bag of sandwiches. There were six, and I gave two to Simeon.

"We will eat ours when we get to the top," I said to Paul. I knew the path, and led the way, which was tortuous and rather rough.

"I see your wings to-day. I only suspected them before," called Paul, who could not begin to keep up with me in the steep ascent. I was perched on the very top of the rocky ridge when he appeared.

"I like this," he said, and took his place on a ledge a little below me. "Here one seems to have come to the very brink."

The view stretched far across the valley, bounded on the other side by another line of blue hills. Wherever the forest did not hide it the Swallow River in its many windings showed blue and placid. Everywhere there were masses of woods; some still holding unbroken their hue of the deepest green; others burning with the red and gold of a conflagration. Here and there one single tree would stand out all rosy fire, while another was faint primrose yellow. But for the most part the wide landscape unfolded an infinite variety of soft russety tints.

We ate our sandwiches and talked quietly about climbing mountains, — about the views we loved best. The air here was still, clear, and cool, and the sense of enjoyment of the marvelous serenity, of the soft brightness of the place, was something that Paul did not try to break.

We sat there getting this glimpse of the glory of the world just half an hour, then I said, —

"It is time to go."

He gave a little shiver but jumped up and

held out his hand, silently offering to help me down.

"We must ride hard," I said as we mounted; "I have to be at home at three o'clock, for Mr. Bevis is coming." Then when we were speeding on our way I asked, "Do you know where this road leads?"

"I hoped it led to the end of the world," said Paul.

"Your horse knows that he is on the home stretch," I observed. "M—— lies not many miles ahead."

We said no more until we had covered some considerable stretch of distance, then I pulled up, held out my hand, and said:—

"The Swallowfield road branches off here. Good-by." And so we parted.

CHAPTER XXVII

SINCE THIS WAS WRITTEN, AND NEEDS MUST BE

It was March before I saw Paul again. When I reached home that October afternoon and told Mr. Bevis that Paul Chauncey and I had had a ride to High Rock together, he made no answer, but appeared to be stunned. He sat very quiet and dejected all the evening; no effort of mine to interest him seemed quite to rouse him. Although I knew that I had made him unhappy, I did not try to change his mood. He cheered up a little next day while we were planting bulbs. It grew much colder that afternoon, and if the wind went down there would come a frost, and a killing one, we said to each other. I was glad, I added, that the bulbs were all in now. I was quite ready for the winter. I did not dread it. It would add a zest to my contentment, while I sat indoors by the fire, to feel that our bulbs had had time to stretch their roots into the warm rich earth, so as to be ready to spring up as soon as the February snows melted. As we walked, we talked about Jem and Dorothy, and speculated as to how Dorothy would finally make up that mind of hers.

"I only wish I felt as sure of Gay's good luck as I do of Jem's," Mr. Bevis remarked with tragic emphasis.

"Why, who was speaking about Gay?" said I.

"I am," said Mr. Bevis. "My nerves are stretched to fiddle-strings in my anxiety about Gay."

I turned and smiled into his face, and put my hand on his sleeve.

"Don't be alarmed for Gay," I said, and I think Mr. Bevis went away presently feeling a little more at ease in heart and mind.

The winter did pass swiftly. At first in preparing for Christmas, then in getting over it. I had the feeling that I did not want this first Christmas to come too merrily in the old house, but it was merry nevertheless. I had Mr. and Mrs. Bickerdyke and Aunt Mary, and Jack and Lilly, and their children. Over at the Lees there was great rejoicing, for Lucy was at home with her happy little brood. Gay came as well, and of course I saw him constantly. Mrs. Lee and I had contrived all sorts of Christmas treats for the children of the factory people over at South Swallowfield, and also nearer home, and Gay was helpful. But almost the only time we had any quiet talk together was once, when late one afternoon I was coming back from the rectory, and he had joined me. It was New Year's Eve. Snow had fallen the night before, and was piled up on

the side of the walks and made a curious crunching sound beneath our feet.

"I suppose you have heard," I said then to Gay, "that Dorothy, when she went back to England, found she had left her heart here."

"With Jem?" he exclaimed with frank surprise and delight.

"Did you fancy, then, it might be with you?" I inquired.

He did not mind my malice, at least, did not consider it worth answering.

"And Jem has not told me," he exclaimed with sad amazement, that old friends could be forgotten.

"I only heard at noon to-day. It was Mrs. Clare who wrote me the news," I explained. "She says that Dorothy is at present too much stunned to be able to write a word. She sits and seems to dream. It's so curious, she confides to her mother, *that it was so all the time.* But still, until she met Jem here last summer, she had supposed that she liked Mr. Chevenix rather particularly."

We were walking close together between the high piled snowbanks, and the sun just sinking in the southwest shone straight in our faces, quite blinding me.

"Now I will confess that I was rather in favor of Mr. Chevenix," I added. "I never knew before that I was such a lover of the English

nobility. But I quite longed to have our Dorothy turn out a peeress."

"Jem is likely to do great things before he dies," said Gay.

The sun had gone, and I could look again at Gay while I told him, for the first time, about Jem's bold wooing on that far-away Sunday afternoon in June. I had expected that he would laugh with me, but instead he flushed deeply, and turned unaccountably grave. Something in his manner then and again when he bade me good-by at my door, saying that he could not come in, that he was going away, but would be back in a fortnight, puzzled me. In fact, what he had not said, what he had not looked, not only puzzled but troubled me. Not to be absolutely good friends with Gay would be for me to miss something essential out of my life. He was so right-minded, besides being clever; he was so absolutely loyal and generous, so incapable of anything false or petty, that I should have missed his judgment, besides his close intimate friendship at every turn. He was back in a fortnight's time, and all through the winter came frequently to Swallowfield to see his mother, who, gentle, delicate old lady, was less strong than usual. He had some business in Washington at present, some government position connected with the Department which had to do with Forestry, and it kept him here at the East.

But although I saw him frequently through these weeks and months, I was conscious that there was just that little breath of strangeness between us.

The winter soon passed. It was a day in March when Paul Chauncey came to see me. I was at my desk in the library writing to Dorothy, when he was ushered in. I turned, and there he was beside me.

"I am tired of living like a stray dog out in the rain," he said. "I felt as if I must have warmth and comfort, so I have come to see you."

He smiled as he held out his hand. I might take his words as a joke or as a confession that lays bare the soul of a man. He did not look like a dog shivering in the rain, but like a man who feels the fullest pulse-beat of life and purpose. It seemed to me that I had never in my life seen him in such radiant spirits. I gave him my hand, and then went back to my usual seat on one side of the fire, as I did so making a little gesture toward an armchair opposite. On my right a white Angora cat lay purring on a red silk cushion, and the beautiful collie which Gay had given me at Christmas came and lay at my feet, put his head on his paws, and seemed to watch my visitor.

Paul began to talk at once, making inquiries

as to how I had spent the winter; saying that everybody had been disappointed that I had not come to town; that nobody could imagine what I was doing so far away among the snowdrifts. But the fact remained that everybody who had been in town had been tired to death of the long season, and had begun to scatter and to carry their ennui elsewhere long before Lent came in. While he talked half of me seemed to listen, and the other half seemed to watch. He was sufficiently amusing, touching on all sorts of subjects with no little acumen and wit. But what I was conscious of was of something behind his words; of something that was in his thoughts, that looked from his eyes, touched his whole face and expression; something that had mastered and absorbed the whole man. Nothing escaped his interest and his attention. He admired the Angora, and came over and stroked the beautiful white fur while she manifested indifference. He patted the collie, who was easily flattered and propitiated; he spoke of the beauty of the flowers blooming in the window. Two could play at that game, and I talked about the books I had been reading. He turned over the volumes that lay on the table.

"Ah, Felix Rose! He sends you books," he exclaimed.

"Occasionally," I granted; "but Dr. White and I buy all the new books for the library."

"How happy you are," he exclaimed. "How occupied, how interested, how magnificently safe!"

He stood towering above me on the hearth-rug, looking down at me.

"And I," he said, "I have nothing, nothing. My life is utterly empty."

There was something enigmatical in the stillness. It seemed to me as if every single piece of furniture in the room, each picture, each portrait, seemed to know that something was to happen, and to listen and to wait, — not as if I had any conscious part in it.

"While we sat on the rocks that day," he now said in that low, deliberate voice which just reached my ear, "I told you that I had a feeling of coming to the brink, — that is, of coming to a place where I could see over. Ever since that day I have understood more plainly what must happen. I am no longer despondent about the future, helpless before it. At last something beckons."

"What?" I asked quietly.

If I felt physically stirred as if something called me, as if some force was making an effort to compel me, my thoughts were very clear.

"Freedom," he replied.

He had sat down again, but now he had drawn his chair so near that he could put his hand on the arm of mine.

"We men and women don't often think for ourselves," he said, looking straight at me with intense seriousness. "We go on accepting the thinking of other people; their ideas, which have been imposed upon us, but which do not belong to us at all. You, no doubt, have often said as I have, '*I could never, under any circumstances, act as those people are doing! I would die rather than do that thing!*' But the time comes, and we see that it is worth while for us mortals to make our little snatch at happiness. I myself am very humanly interested in being happy. I am hungry to be happy, almost savagely eager to be happy."

I seemed to hear voices; not Paul's, for his was soft, clear, and distinct as a bell, but voices soft, insurgent, clamorous, almost multitudinous; as if everything in the room were whispering to me.

A hand was laid on mine.

"And I know, Marcia," Paul said, "that you loved me, loved me always from the very first day when we met here. And I am certain that you love me still."

I am a supremely happy woman now, and while I write my two children, my two splendid boys, are playing near me. Nevertheless, I do not like to think of that moment when Paul, with that vivid look in his blue eyes, with that

subtleness and robustness of logic, laid claim to my future, and seemed to dare to tell me that he might be faithless and disloyal, but that I must love him still. My will, the will of the woman, seemed not to have counted with him. He had flung down his argument as a passionate card-player flings down his ace of trumps.

But I too had a few words to say. While he had been speaking, I had seen quite clearly. What I answered now was not the result of careful analysis or reasoning, but a sequence that came irresistibly. It was a way of seeing steadily and seeing whole; of getting rid of everything but the essentials. Something rose up in me; that part of me which hated what was weak, paltry, irresponsible; something older than I; something I valued, believed in, wished to live by.

Always I had longed to be good to Paul; to be large-minded and magnanimous. Nothing is so easy sometimes as to forgive. Paul had hitherto stood to me for something that was not himself. There is a certain tragedy in not attaining one's heart's desire, but there is a worse tragedy in finding out that what one once believed to be one's heart's desire is something to which to say, "No more forever."

I wished to be at once terse, definite, convincing, so I told Paul I was to marry Gaynor Lee.

Gay came to see me only two days after Paul had gathered himself up and left me without a word or look.

"Marcia," Gay said, "I am going to be very frank; I am going to say what perhaps I have no right to say. But I hear that that man has been here."

"Paul Chauncey? Yes, he was here."

"Mr. Chilton tells me he hears that he has consulted two lawyers about the best way of taking steps to get a divorce."

"He made some allusion to the matter," I replied.

Gay took a step forward, and stood looking straight into my eyes.

He suffered; I could see that he suffered; not only for himself, but for me and with me, in my possible pain of wounded pride. He did not, at this moment, know that all this humiliation, this soreness of understanding, this disillusion, this sense of self-abasement, had brought me very close to him, had made me feel my need of him. What he said was, —

"Don't believe this makes me unhappy simply because I love you with all my heart and soul; because I have hungered and thirsted for you all these years! At this moment, Marcia, I look down upon that feeling. I feel as if I did not care whether you ever loved me or not, whether you ever married me or not, but as if the only

thing essential is that you should stand to me forever as the one woman who could never surrender to anything that was base; who could put her all on one splendid chance, and love the best and do the best, and to whom duty and honor and obligation were real things."

He astonished me by the fire, the dignity, with which he spoke. It sounded in my ears and to my heart like a summons. Still, I did not at that moment tell Gay the secret I had told Paul. What I answered was, —

"It is safe for you to go on loving and trusting me, Gay. I would die rather than to disappoint you. What I love best in life has been bought at a great price. I shall not fling it away."

We were married early in June, and went over to England for Dorothy's wedding. But I did not know exactly what was to happen until one evening at the beginning of May, when he came over to show me the present he was to send to Dorothy by Jem.

"I'm afraid it is rather extravagant," he remarked, "but I always did love Dorothy, and I am so glad about her and Jem."

It was indeed a very extravagant present, for it was a string of pearls beautifully matched, and with a diamond clasp.

"And while I was about it," Gay proceeded, "I could not help thinking about myself. I have dreamed so long; I want to be awake. And you

know, dear, I love you so, — I have always loved you so!"

Suddenly bending over me, perhaps he saw tears in my eyes.

"Marcia, Marcia," he cried, "may I put this ring on your finger?"

I let him put it on. His love made me humble, grateful, happy. I was glad to please him.

He pushed back my hair, and looked into my eyes. "I am not like Jem, I am not so sure of myself," he said. "I dare not snatch at my joy; I should like to feel sure that my wife will love me a little."

"She will," I promised him.

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